

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

# Sight & Sound



# Guillermo del Toro

ON 'CRIMSON PEAK'

- DEEP FOCUS: THE TARKOVSKY LEGACY ● 'THE LOBSTER' ● TORONTO AND VENICE REPORTS
- 'SICARIO' AND MEXICO/US BORDER THRILLERS ● CAREY MULLIGAN ON 'SUFFRAGETTE'

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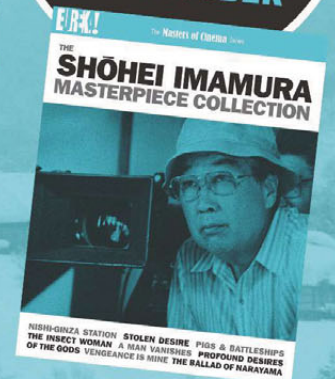
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"A fusion of drama, documentary and chance happening,  
that explodes the creative process"

Stewart Lee

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Sinclair

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Written by  
Andrew  
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## COVER

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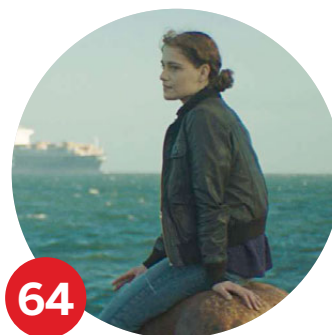
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# fresh

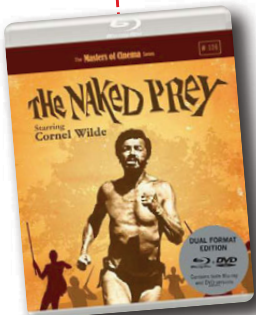
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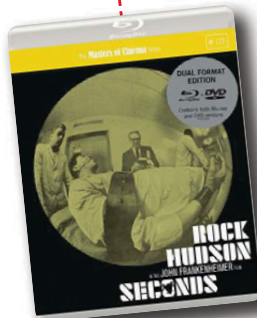
**april 9th**  
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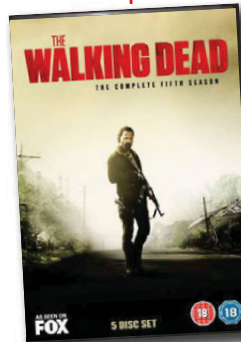
**the naked prey**  
dual format edition  
released 19/10/15



**seconds**  
dual format edition  
released 26/10/15



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out now



**the cut**  
released 12/10/15



**mad men: season 7 - part 2**  
also available on blu-ray  
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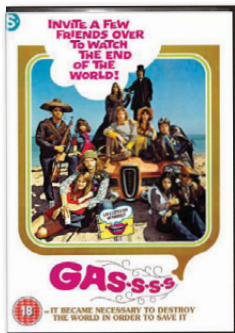


**mr holmes**  
also available on blu-ray  
released 26/10/15



**la famille bélier**  
subtitled/french  
out now

**gassss**  
released 26/10/15



**love is all**  
released 19/10/15



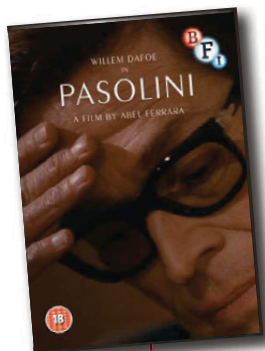
**night and the city**  
blu-ray  
out now



**nosferatu**  
blu-ray: remastered edition  
released 19/10/15



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# Editorial Nick James



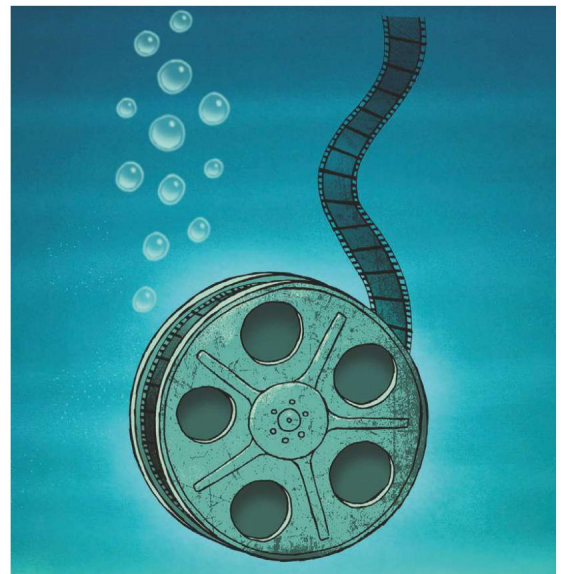
## PRECIOUS CARGO

Of all the images from the 30 films I saw at the Toronto Film Festival in September, one has really stuck in my mind. It's from Aleksandr Sokurov's *Francoфония* (see page 16): footage of a container ship caught in a terrifying storm, smashing its way through huge waves that strip it of some of its load. The film's fictional conceit is that these elongated metal boxes all contain great art. Sokurov uses the notion to remind us that much of the art in Europe's great museums is imperial plunder, and that rare objects often didn't survive being filched and sent from far-flung places back to Paris, London, Lisbon, Vienna, Madrid, Berlin or Moscow. His film is a meditation on the Louvre and how its great works survived the Nazi invasion in 1940 and the occupation that lasted until 1944.

Much of the art was stashed away by the French in chateaus across the country. At one moment Sokurov says – and I don't know if he's being glib, ironic, truthful to his feelings or merely calculating numbers – that the art in the Louvre is “worth more than all of France”. Perhaps he means, “If you can't save the country, at least save the art.” With this potentially ruthless sentiment, Sokurov seems to have one eye on the destruction being wrought on great archeological sites by Isis. If so, that was the only reference I came across in the whole festival to any aspect of the crisis resulting from the war in Syria. Michael Moore's documentary *Where to Invade Next*, for instance (see our ‘First Look’ review online), must have been made too soon to include the hundreds of thousands of desperate people who have decided to come to the same Germany that Moore eulogises as one of the nations he regards as having great social welfare ideas. When it comes to political realities, cinema is always slow to react.

The preservation of art seems to be as much a zeitgeist issue as the preservation of people. The late Michael Jacobs's unfinished but recently published final book *Everything Is Happening: Journey into a Painting* – about Velázquez's great work *Las meninas* – recalls the time during the Spanish civil war when much of the Prado's collection was removed from Madrid to Geneva by the Republican government. We've seen such films as George Clooney's *The Monuments Men*, about a team of art experts tasked with tracking down works looted by the Nazis, and Volker Schlöndorff's *Diplomacy*, in which the German military governor of Paris is persuaded

*The routes now being sailed and trodden by refugees are the same routes much of the imperial plunder from wars travelled to reach the great museums in the West*



to go against Hitler's orders by refusing to destroy great public monuments such as the Eiffel Tower.

It is, of course, salutary to be reminded that great art is perishable. In another article in this issue (see page 46) – apropos the BFI Southbank season ‘Mirroring Tarkovsky’ – I've looked at Tarkovsky and Sokurov's uses of high art as inspiration. The Russian filmmakers have a particular reverence for classical figurative works. One of the questions that immediately came up when the season was announced was whether we'd be screening the Tarkovskys on 35mm. In fact we're hoping to show brand new digital prints. It's understandable that those who want the best experience of Tarkovsky remain loyal to 35mm, but it's become increasingly difficult to satisfy that desire. It's an illustration that film, though more portable and more easily duplicated than great paintings, is vulnerable none the less.

But to return to *Francoфония* and the consequences of the war in Syria, in one scene we see Gericault's great masterpiece *The Raft of the Medusa* propped up against the wall in a corridor of the chateau where it was hidden – it is probably the most famous image in great art which allows us to imagine the terror of refugees crossing the Mediterranean. Sokurov's container ship is also an irresistible reminder of people risking their lives at sea. The director doesn't say as much but the routes now being sailed and trodden by refugees are the same routes much of the imperial plunder from wars travelled to reach the great museums in the West. The challenge for cinema – arguably a more democratic artform than great paintings – is to come up with works that might help to illuminate what's happening. Sokurov's *Francoфония*, whatever its preference for art over people, is a nudge in the right direction. **S**



IN THE FRAME

## POSTER BOY



Scenes of the crimes: Graham Humphreys's poster for Dario Argento's *Inferno* (1980)

Graham Humphreys's painterly, retro posters have been making horror fans shudder, in a good way, for more than 30 years

By Jane Giles

The names of film poster artists are little known beyond the fan circuits, yet their work has often dominated film marketing and the way audiences approach movies. In the UK several decades of cinema-going were defined by the posters of Tom Chantrell – including those for Hammer, *Carry On...* and *Star Wars*. But as the author Christopher Fowler has described, the work of illustrators was not valued by the British film industry: “Hundreds of pieces of original art, including elaborate dioramas and poster-paint masterpieces created for the Rank Film Organisation in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, were broken up and tossed into rubbish bins. Typically, they were seen as ephemeral and worthless. The underpaid and undervalued UK artists who utilised the UK’s unique quad shape did not own their own work, and were rarely able to keep copies.”

Born in 1960, Graham Humphreys was starting out just as the British masters of illustrated film poster art were beginning to retire. He grew up drawing Daleks on the wall with crayons, and studied graphic design and illustration at Salisbury College of Art from 1976 – the birth of punk was a formative experience, as was the arrival of psychobilly a few years later. Humphreys’s work was always intensely cinematic, his pigments recalling 1950s Eastman filmstock and the lighting of Hammer films, his cultural outlook rooted in *Frankenstein* (1931), *Dracula* (1931) and the other Universal creature features of the 1930s, movies shown late on BBC2 and the lurid covers of Pan horror novels.

Young, talented and cheap, Humphreys was taken on by the film and video distributor Palace Pictures, which specialised in crossing over cult and arthouse films into the mainstream, exploiting genre titles and cornering the burgeoning VHS home entertainment market. He designed and illustrated many Palace campaigns, most influentially *The Evil Dead* (1984) and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1982). *The Evil Dead* landed in rental stores just as the Video

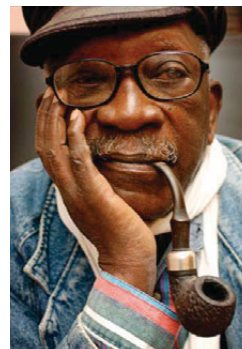
### Home Movie Day

Rediscover your forgotten memories on 17 October – International Home Movie Day – a worldwide celebration of amateur film which helps people project and preserve their old home movies. London Home Movie Day takes place later, on 7 November at Kennington’s Cinema Museum, with screenings throughout the day and archivists on hand to give feedback and advice.



### Africa in Motion

‘Sembène!’, a portrait of legendary Senegalese director Ousmane Sembène (right), is just one highlight of this celebration of African cinema new and old across Edinburgh and Glasgow (23 October – 1 November). Also of note is Rwandan director Kivu Ruhorahoza’s experimental feature ‘Things of the Aimless Wanderer’, charting Africa’s relationship with the West.



ON OUR  
RADAR





**Zombie history:** Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* (1982)


Recordings Act of 1984 – which brought in a new classification scheme to combat the supposed threat of video nasties – played havoc with the distribution of horror movies. Humphreys's thrilling cover artwork, with its acid-trip colours and zombie faces, became emblematic of moral panic and rebellion. The *Evil Dead* poster is Humphreys's *Citizen Kane*, an early great work that hit the zeitgeist and defined his career.

Humphreys's early work was completely hand-painted; he still uses gouache on paper, though now supplemented with a computer. Some digital illustrators add layers of texture to create the illusion of physical paint, but Humphreys retains any unplanned and spontaneous marks, plus the raw textures of brush on paper. "It's illustration but delivered using modern technology," he says. "All final art is scanned and only tweaked digitally in order to enhance or retouch, while retaining the integrity of the original painting."

After Palace, Humphreys became house designer for Tartan Films, creating visual identities for titles such as Miike Takashi's *Audition* (1999), Rob Zombie's *House of 1000 Corpses* (2003), Jodorowsky's *El Topo* (1970) and the Ramones doc *End of the Century* (2003). He remains the go-to guy for grindhouse and horror posters, rivalled in the UK only by fellow illustrator Tom Hodge, aka The Dude Designs. But

Humphreys has also designed across a huge range of genres and titles, including Mike Leigh's *Life Is Sweet* and the BFI's Children's Film Foundation DVDs, as well as creating storyboards, collectable products, brand identities (such as Hammer's new logo), educational projects, private commissions and album covers, and working for the music press. A career-long association with the design agency The Creative Partnership continues, but he remains thoroughly freelance.

This month, an exhibition at the Proud Camden gallery in London will feature a selection of original artworks by Humphreys, from 1981 to the present, including his posters for *The Evil Dead*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *What We Do in the Shadows*, as well as the one he created for the Flicker Club's season of horror films *Hammer at the Vault*.

Film marketing is generally hyperbolic, airbrushing a film's flaws to cover a lack of budget and hard-sell the product. But Humphreys's work is characterised as much by sincerity and absence of cynicism as by enthusiasm, reverence and humour. And if the film turns out to be not so great it doesn't matter too much – his artwork is worth the price of the ticket or DVD by itself. 

**i** **'Drawing Blood: the film poster art of Graham Humphreys' is at Proud Camden, London, from 29 October – 22 November**

#### UK Jewish Film Festival

The programme packs in 80 films at cinemas across the country from 7–22 November, among them László Nemes's 'Son of Saul' (right) – which shows the Holocaust, one of cinema's most morally complex subjects, in a new light – Nadav Lapid's elliptical tale of a child prodigy 'The Kindergarten Teacher', and inventive Israeli horror 'JeruZalem'.



#### Beasts of No Nation

Netflix's first foray into filmmaking will now have a modest theatrical release in the UK, in Curzon cinemas from 9 October. Adapted from Uzodinma Iweala's 2005 novel by director Cary Fukunaga, this lauded and brutal tale of child soldiers led by Idris Elba's warlord (right) in an unnamed west African nation beset by civil war, will be available online a week later.



#### LISTOMANIA

### THE GAMBLERS

Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck's *Mississippi Grind* stands in a long tradition of movies about gamblers addicted to cards and shooting dice

- 1 **Bob le flambeur** (1956)  
Jean-Pierre Melville
- 2 **The Cincinnati Kid** (1965)  
Norman Jewison
- 3 **5 Card Stud** (1968)  
Henry Hathaway
- 4 **The Sting** (1973)  
George Roy Hill
- 5 **California Split** (1974)  
Robert Altman
- 6 **The Gambler** (1974, below)  
Karel Reisz
- 7 **Atlantic City** (1980)  
Louis Malle
- 8 **God of Gamblers** (1989)  
Wong Jing
- 9 **Hard Eight** (1996)  
Paul Thomas Anderson
- 10 **Rounders** (1998)  
John Dahl



#### QUOTE OF THE MONTH CHANTAL AKERMAN

'When you try to show reality in cinema, most of the time it's totally false. But when you show what's going on in people's minds that's very cinematic.'

**A Chantal Akerman exhibition runs at Ambika P3, London, from 31 October – 6 December**





# WHERE'S THE BEEF?



Irony maiden: Ellen Page with her hamburger phone in *Juno* (2007)

The hamburger phone in *Juno* follows a tradition of ironic teen accoutrements in US indie comedy – but what's all that irony hiding?



**By Hannah McGill**

Speech in Jason Reitman's *Juno* (2007) serves distanciation as much as communication. The emotional complexity

of what is happening to the characters (a baby is accidentally conceived in a first sexual encounter between two teenagers who love each other, but aren't ready to be parents; abortion is considered and rejected; adoptive parents are found, and the pregnancy carried to term) is masked and evaded via endless slangy wisecracks. The visual metaphor the film offers for its remoulding of a flesh-and-blood ordeal as a spiky quipathon is the novelty hamburger-shaped telephone on which Juno calls her best friend Leah to tell her the news. Something gory (animal flesh) disguised as something less gory (a hamburger patty hidden in a bun), replicated in plastic and repurposed to serving another function entirely. "I am fo shizz up the spout," Juno says into her hamburger

phone. "Honest to blog?" squeaks Leah. "Phuket, Thailand!" Then she starts asking Juno which of two local abortion clinics, clearly familiar among their peer group, she intends to use.

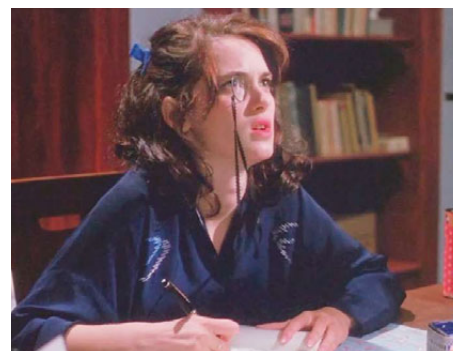
By overdubbing the pain and confusion of one in Juno's situation with humour of a fashionably wordy and ironic type, Diablo Cody's script makes safe the frightening prospect of unwanted pregnancy. Though Ellen Page's lead performance clearly communicates that anxiety and doubt underlie Juno's public performance of pert composure, the film pulls back each time authentic emotions surface in order to sub in a gag. When Juno does find herself lost for words, arranging an appointment at the

abortion clinic, she blames her telephone:

"I'm on my hamburger phone – it's just really awkward to talk on." Awkwardness in *Juno* is evaded entirely, or sluiced away, with a sterile wash of smart talk, with the consequence that the film presents a world at once unconvincingly gentle and unconvincingly cruel. Even the anti-abortionist who startles Juno into cancelling her termination is cutesified: she chants the slogan, "All babies want to get borned!" and holds a sign stating, "No babies like murdering." Something troubling (an anti-choice zealot) disguised as something less troubling (a sweet, verbally challenged schoolgirl), replicated in quirky comedic form and repurposed as a plot device...



Thora Birch, masked in *Ghost World* (2001)



Winona Ryder, monocolled in *Heathers* (1989)



Giving characters kooky accoutrements to emphasise their unease with social norms and expectations is, of course, normal and expected in the sort of indie comedies *Juno* carries in its DNA. The hearse driven by Harold in *Harold and Maude* (1971), the monocle affected by Veronica in *Heathers* (1989), and Enid's fetish mask in *Ghost World* (2001) are all precursors of the hamburger phone. It's an object that shows us that Juno is unworldly enough to use a landline, and enough of a knowing, sarky oddball to make a point of embracing dated trash. Yet it also communicates a sense that, on some level, this girl is solid and traditional enough to appreciate the appeal of a blue-collar American icon like the classic hamburger. These co-existing meanings reflect the ambiguities of pop art, that elevation of the ordinary of which the hamburger phone is a mass-produced offshoot. A slightly baffled article in November 1964's *LIFE* magazine explored the fashion among pop artists for portraying foodstuffs: Claes Oldenburg's burgers and ice-creams; Jasper Johns's cans of beer; Robert Watts's felt apples. "The great production belt of our greatest industry," wrote Calvin Tomkins, "overwhelms us at every season with gorgeously-coloured, bigger-than-life-sized comestibles, and if the frozen-in flavor of wax beans sometimes turns out to be the flavor of wax, this is all part of the world's highest standard of living. It is also part of the new American 'reality' that pop artists have

*'Juno' is a film about an intense experience that comes denuded of intensity, but maybe bloodlessness is the source of its poignancy*

chosen as their main subject – although they keep telling us that their work is not social comment."

Tomkins goes on to call Watts's apples "neither an imitation, nor an imaginative reconstruction of the real thing"; they "exist in the no man's land between art and life", a diagnosis one might also apply to *Juno*. This is a film about an extraordinarily intense experience that comes denuded of intensity; a film about one of the most contentious political issues of its day which its own director boasted was "apolitical"; a film that rejects conventional Hollywood schmaltz only to find new ways for people to say things to one another that it's impossible to imagine being said in real life. Perhaps, in the end, its very bloodlessness is the source of its indirect poignancy. *Juno*'s hamburger phone is a relic of the 80s revival of pop-inflected Americana: in other words, it's an ironic appropriation of an ironic appropriation. (The film writers who received promotional *Juno* hamburger phones upon the film's release were at another remove again.) *Juno*'s generation is nostalgic for the relative frankness of a time in which a hamburger might have been celebrated as a delightful thing, not a symbol of industrial corruption, environmental abuses and calorific excess. In making *Juno*'s choice to have her baby adopted appear straightforward and bloodless, the film undertakes a similar rejection of tiresome old moral complexity. 🍔

## THE FIVE KEY...

# SOLO SURVIVAL DRAMAS

On an island, in the desert, at sea or in space – the lone individual struggling to stay alive can make for gripping drama

**By Nick Pinkerton**

Matt Damon always seems to need a ride back home. He was the paratrooper brought back at great cost in *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), stranded on a barren planet in *Interstellar* (2014), and now left behind on Mars in *The Martian* (reviewed on page 83). The idea of man alone pitted against his environment goes back at least as far as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719); recent film examples include *127 Hours* (2010), and *All Is Lost* and *Gravity* (both 2013), which respectively represent the out-to-sea and lost-in-space subgenres. (*Gravity* is an outlier, for it is mostly man against the environment – the female survivalist is the horror film's 'final girl'.) These survivalist standouts, however, keep their feet firmly on terra firma, with one eye open.



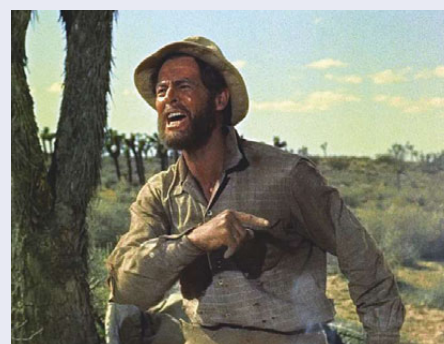
## 2 Robinson Crusoe (1953)

The gold standard for adaptations of Defoe's foundational survivalist text is a Mexican production with an Irish-American leading man (Daniel O'Herlihy) and a Spanish director – Luis Buñuel, a jolly blasphemer who inevitably gave a highly individual reading of the original Christian parable, his first experiment in colour photography lending the proceedings, per critic Ado Kyrou, "a Rousseau-like accent".



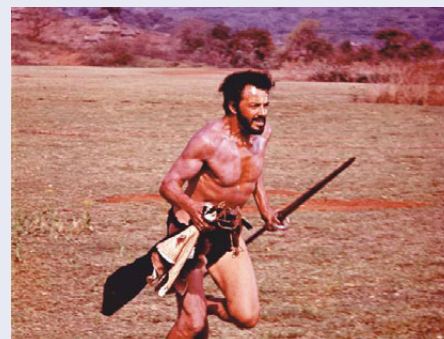
## 4 Cast Away (2000)

The survivalist narrative is too often an excuse for banal 'visceral' filmmaking, but Robert Zemeckis's deeply felt *fin-de-millennium* take on the Crusoe story explored the spiritual and physical toll of isolation. Zemeckis's frank appeal to the emotions leaves him open to the scoffers, but Tom Hanks's gut-emptying roar of separation-anxiety anguish when he loses his only 'companion' reverberates through the years.



## 1 Inferno (1953)

Robert Ryan had greater endurance for punishment than almost any other actor of his day – see his four gut-bruising rounds boxing in *The Set-Up* (1949) if you doubt it – and it's put to the test in Roy Ward Baker's outdoor action film. Ryan plays a millionaire left for dead in the Mojave desert by his two-timing wife (Rhonda Fleming) and her lover after he breaks a leg falling from his horse.



## 3 The Naked Prey (1965)

Originally set in the American West and based on explorer John Colter's escape from a band of Blackfoot warriors, *The Naked Prey* pits the disconcertingly fit 53-year-old director-star Cornel Wilde against a tribal war party running him down on the African veldt – keeping things moving at a clip not equalled or bettered until Mel Gibson's 138-minute Mayan-language dash *Apocalypse* (2006).



## 5 The Grey (2011)

Unlike Richard Harris in *Man in the Wilderness* (1971) or Robert Redford in *Jeremiah Johnson* (1972), Liam Neeson isn't alone for most of Joe Carnahan's film – he's trying to keep a dwindling group of plane-crash survivors alive and ahead of a circling pack of Arctic wolves. But he's alone come the end, facing off the wolves with knuckle-dusters made of broken bottles; that this isn't the movie's best scene says plenty.

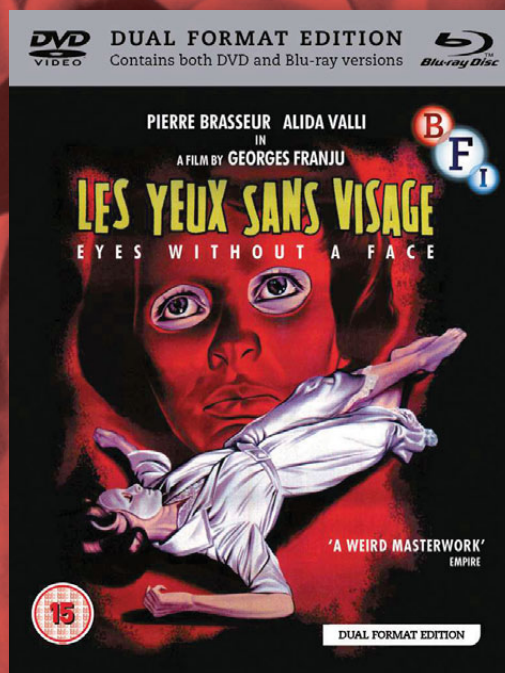




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# TIME FOR A CHANGE

Transgender is suddenly a popular subject – but transitions of all sorts, crossing boundaries, are at the heart of film



**By Mark Cousins**

Trans. The next frontier. Lana Wachowski. Eddie Redmayne realising he's a woman in Tom Hooper's *The Danish Girl*. Caitlyn J. and all that. A

suffix becomes a noun. The next liberation movement.

What about transitioning in film? In the forward to a forthcoming book, critic Dina Jordanova says the reason she has taught and researched transnational cinema, as opposed to national cinema, for most of her life is that she had no choice. As a Bulgarian who's spent time in many countries and who established the film studies course in St Andrews in Scotland, her life has been transnational. Bulgarians know a thing or two about regime change, about how empires swash and backwash across places; Jordanova has written a lot about the Balkans, Europe's most trans zone. Cinemas and frontiers.

Cinema was very trans in the silent days. Chaplin's face was perhaps the most trans image in the world in the 1920s. It defied borders. The fact that he was a gentleman and a tramp, a man and a kid, clumsy and elegant made him the essence of trans. He was always switching polarities. He was iridescent. Proof that there is a collective unconscious. Of course his image travelled, his fame travelled, because of the power of the industrial machine behind it. He was received everywhere, in part because Hollywood put him everywhere. Film history

hasn't always been so fluid, so sharing. One of its failures is the fact that the great silent films of Ozu Yasujiro weren't sent much outside Japan, for others to enjoy and be influenced by. Other countries didn't discover his work until the 1950s.

And cinema has continued to have a mixed trans record. A brilliant film like Wong Kar Wai's *In the Mood for Love* (2000) can travel the world and somehow convince people in many different countries that it is evoking their own regrets, their own pasts, yet much of what has really travelled in sound cinema has been action film – Bruce Lee and Arnie – and Bollywood, films that feel about everywhere and nowhere. In comparison, comic cinema in the sound era has been national.

In Britain, some of the best films – the Bill Douglas Trilogy, the Ealing comedies, *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives*, etc – have been very rooted in nation, yet the Powell and Pressburger films are trans (Emeric Pressburger was an émigré, of course), and Nic Roeg's work is too. *Performance* is a great film about transitioning – its advertising line was "Vice. And Versa" – and think of the identity fugues in *Walkabout* and *Bad Timing*.

I've watched my own transitions. Greying hair. The happiness of youth tempered by bereavements. Narrow views expanded by travel. I'm not who I ever was. I look at Bernini's sculpture of Apollo chasing Daphne, in which she is depicted *in medias res*, transforming into a laurel tree, and think, wowser, that's me. *Metamorphoses*: maybe Ovid is the patron saint of our age. I think of the great films about ageing, and *Boyhood* is the

*Cinema was very trans in the silent days. Chaplin's face was the most trans image in the world in the 1920s. It defied borders*

first to come to mind. But then I remember Jeff Preiss's astonishing film *STOP* (2012), about his daughter. He filmed her for many years, during which she decided that she was a boy. We see a son emerge. It's beautiful. Trans squared. And I've just seen Hanna Polak's film *Something Better to Come*, about a girl who lives on a rubbish dump on the edge of Moscow. We meet Yula when she's 10, and follow her for 13 years, in which Russia transitions, and Yula numbs her life with booze, and becomes a woman. And I think, too, of Jess Franco's weird cut of Orson Welles's *Don Quixote* (1992), in which the actors change age from scene to scene, because the film was shot over so many years. Cinema is good at capturing trans. It's good at caterpillars becoming butterflies.

But it's the opposite, too. By filming something, you stop it ch-ch-ch-changing. Shirley MacLaine doesn't age in *The Apartment*, for example. James Dean is forever young. The celluloid decays but through the decay we glimpse the face of some half-forgotten silent bit-player.

In *Notes on the Death of Culture*, a new collection of essays by Mario Vargas Llosa, the Peruvian Nobel prize-winner argues that images are not dependable because they are potent and fleeting. At their best they're the former, but why do we think images are fleeting? The gorgeous 2nd-century BC paintings in Ajanta in India are still there, the opposite of fleeting. So is the Sphinx, Egypt's Garbo. And then there's the photo of Aylan Kurdi, lying face down, dead, on a Turkish beach. His father, Abdullah, was transitioning, from Syria to, he hoped, Canada. Instead, his wife and two sons died at sea, because they were making a perilous journey by boat, because our borders are semi-closed to people like them. Not only was that image dependable, it scythed through the noise of our times. An image of the failure of trans, the punishment for trying to trans.

We're not all transitioning. ☹





DEVELOPMENT TALE

## LISTEN TO ME MARLON



A dangerous method: *Listen to Me Marlon* aspires to be a study of life, as well as a study of a remarkable life

When the Brando estate opened up hundreds of hours of the actor's private recordings, the filmmakers knew they had struck gold

**By Charles Gant**

Our image of Marlon Brando is of a private man, and his aversion to the limelight only increased with his son Christian's manslaughter conviction in 1991 and his daughter Cheyenne's suicide four years later. Screen appearances in the last two decades of his life were relatively scant. But as he hid away inside his sprawling Los Angeles mansion on Mulholland Drive, few suspected that he was engaged in an ambitious project of personal revelation.

*Listen to Me Marlon* began three years ago with a conversation in Soho House in LA, between prolific documentary producer John Battsek and R.J. Cutler, best known as the director of *The September Issue* (2009). Battsek, who produced Oscar winners *One Day in September* (1999) and *Searching for Sugar Man* (2012), suggested Brando as a subject. Cutler met with Mike Medavoy, former agent, former studio chief and veteran producer who is also co-executor of the Brando

estate. Medavoy revealed that "there's some archive," says Battsek, "and R.J. started to have a look, but basically it didn't go anywhere".

Eight months passed, Cutler went off to direct the fiction feature *If I Stay* (2014), and then Austin Wilkin, who oversees Brando's archive, got in touch with Battsek. The pair had worked together on Ondi Timoner's documentary *We Live in Public* (2009). At a meeting at the LA office of the Brando estate's lawyers, Battsek was given the go-ahead to make the film: "You can have the keys to the cupboard," he was told. Then he learned that the contents included hundreds of hours of audio recordings.

Battsek says, "I am sure you can imagine, as a doc producer, whatever the subject, the magic words are: 'We have a treasure trove of movie footage that's never been seen.' Or, the next best, 'We've got hundreds of hours of audio recordings that the subject made that have never been heard.' Immediately a light went off in my head: OK, that presents us with the possibility of something interesting."

Brando, it turns out, had been documenting his life for decades, making Dictaphone recordings of his thoughts and recollections. Initially made for therapeutic reasons or as a personal record, they later inspired the actor to propose turning

them into a film. As he is heard saying in *Listen to Me Marlon*, "It will be a highly personalised documentary... on the life, activities of myself, Marlon Brando. We establish that he's a troubled man, alone, beset with memories... in a state of confusion and sadness, isolation, disorder." His death in 2004 ended any such plan.

Returning to London, Battsek contacted Stevan Riley, with whom he'd made the 2010 doc *Fire in Babylon* (about West Indian cricket) and 2012's *Everything or Nothing* (about James Bond). "He's a brilliant obsessive," Battsek says. "When someone says we've got 300 hours of audio recordings, I knew I wanted someone who was going to listen to every minute of it. And the only person I'd worked with who I knew would listen to every minute of it is him." Peter Ettedgui, who co-wrote *Everything or Nothing* with Riley, joined the production in the same creative role. Cutler, while remaining in Los Angeles, stayed as producer, and helped finance by bringing in the cable TV outlet Showtime. NBC Universal also came on board.

The Brando archivists had a surprisingly relaxed attitude to the recordings, shipping them all off to Riley in the UK. The estate was also easygoing about the film's creative direction. "Marlon said what was on his mind, he was not shy about anything," Battsek says. "We had



carte blanche to use whatever we wanted.” The only concern was that Christian Brando’s 1990 slaying of his sister’s boyfriend, Dag Drollet, and the ensuing trial should not be the whole subject of the film. It probably didn’t hurt that, since Brando divorced three times and had numerous children, there was no single family member exerting full control over his legacy – the exact opposite of the Martin Luther King scenario, where for decades widow Coretta Scott King stood in the way of filmmakers trying to tell a rounded story about her husband’s life.

Riley and Battsek both had the ambition to tell the story using just Brando’s voice, with no talking head interviews, and just archive clips. Consequently they faced a challenge not dissimilar to Asif Kapadia with his films *Senna* and *Amy*: what are the visual elements going to be? Riley’s first presentation of material to Battsek was certainly unusual. “It was 45 minutes of a black screen with the voice and subtitles on it, and three minutes of images,” the producer says. “It was literally just Marlon’s voice in a dead space. It was a long way off, but I’d sat there, fidgeted once, and I’d been gripped.”

To give his film structure, and to provide a context for Brando’s dominant narration, Riley had an idea for a framing device. Battsek explains: “Marlon is in his house on Mulholland, he’s analysing himself, he’s casting an eye over the way he’s lived his life. He’s going through boxes, and listening to tapes and watching films.” Shooting in Brando’s actual house was

*Initially highly censorious of his own abusive father, Brando finally recognises that he is not so different after all*

out of the question, since next-door neighbour Jack Nicholson bought the expansive, mostly single-tier structure in 2005, and flattened it. A studio shoot provided the solution.

To secure finance, Riley’s treatment proposed “an investigation into the myth of Marlon Brando”, presenting “a nuanced and vulnerable character” who “will question the burden of celebrity and the price of genius”. While that enquiry is present, *Listen to Me Marlon* finds its story arc more in terms of the actor’s relationship with his family. Initially highly censorious of his own abusive father, and defining himself in opposition to him, Brando is transformed by his own troubled experiences as a parent, and finally recognises that he is not so different after all.

“He gets to that point of forgiveness of his father at the end,” Battsek comments. “Through the film, you are witnessing that journey. That layer of the story, we wanted that to come through as strongly as it could, because that’s what we discovered when we listened to the tapes. It’s tragic and poignant, and also resonant – it’s varying degrees of all of our lives, and our relationships with our parents. Because he’s just a human being. His story, it’s a study of life, as well as a study of a remarkable life.”

**i** *Listen to Me Marlon* opens in UK cinemas on 23 October and is reviewed on page 81

## THE NUMBERS LEGEND

By Charles Gant

Two years ago, when StudioCanal signed on to co-finance Working Title’s *Legend* and distribute the film in the UK, the company was excited by the idea of Tom Hardy’s dual performance as Ronnie and Reggie Kray. However, if it was looking for existing evidence that the actor could open a film in the UK, there wasn’t any. All of his box-office hits were in supporting roles (*The Dark Knight Rises*, *Inception*, *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*) or with significant co-stars (*Lawless*, *This Means War*). At that time, his biggest hit where he had provided the primary cast element was 2011’s *Warrior*, which had grossed £1.9 million.

As *Legend*’s release date drew nearer, the Hardy box-office numbers didn’t get any better. *The Drop*, released in November last year, got to £1.7 million. *Child 44*, which followed in April, managed £1.4 million. It could be argued, of course, that Hardy was a popular and much admired actor who just hadn’t found the right star vehicle yet. After all, Benedict Cumberbatch hadn’t successfully opened a movie until last year when his performance as Alan Turing in StudioCanal’s *The Imitation Game* helped push it to £16.4 million in the UK – proving that it’s the alchemical combination of actor and lead role that really resonates with audiences.

For StudioCanal’s marketing boss Hugh Spearing, “The idea of Tom playing both Ron and Reg, plus his brilliance in pulling off the performances, is a really key driver in the success of the movie. A lot of people do recognise how great he is as an actor, and this is probably the best showcase you could have.” It didn’t hurt that in May *Mad Max: Fury Road*, while not wholly dependent on Hardy’s name for its success, finally gave the actor his first bona fide hit, raising his profile.

StudioCanal was sanguine about *Legend*’s 18 certificate, partly because the swearing made it an inevitability (“There was no way round it,” says Spearing), and also because *The Wolf of Wall Street* and *Gone Girl* both



Two for the price of one: Tom Hardy in *Legend*

steamed past £20 million here despite being 18s. However, there was still a concern that the film appeared too violent, which testing of marketing materials had revealed was a turn-off for all audience segments. Intriguingly, reveals Spearing, *Legend* tested best with older females, broadening the audience StudioCanal aimed at.

“We wanted to find a balance between the two characters,” says Spearing. “Reggie being the suave gangster, and the love story that he has in the movie. And then the more volatile dark comedy and violence of the Ronnie character.” Diverse audiences were targeted with different TV spots focusing exclusively on one character, placed within male- and female-skewing shows.

*Legend* opened in the UK with £5.2 million for its first five days of play, and stood at press time, after two weeks of release, with £10.7 million. Hardy ends the year with two £10 million UK hits in leading roles, having begun it with none. More than a decade after the ‘next big thing’ hype first started circulating, he’s finally reached the echelon of bankable leading male actors. **£**

### TOM HARDY AT THE UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
The Dark Knight Rises	2012	£56,257,144
Inception	2010	£35,804,867
Mad Max: Fury Road	2015	£17,393,994
Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy	2011	£14,207,244
Legend	2015	£10,731,304*
RocknRolla	2008	£5,139,585
This Means War	2012	£5,091,537
Star Trek: Nemesis	2003	£4,776,885
Layer Cake	2004	£4,449,216
Lawless	2012	£4,266,925

\* gross after 14 days on release



# DEEP WATERS

## BFI FILM FUND INSIGHTS

John Waters's spectacularly unorthodox career offers a host of invaluable lessons for aspiring, struggling filmmakers



**By Ben Roberts**

I've finally touched the hem of my own personal Jesus... a three-minute conversation with John Waters after his interview at

BFI Southbank in London last month, during the season dedicated to his 50-year career.

We talked about Terence Davies, who I'd spent time with in Toronto for the premiere of his *Sunset Song*. Waters had picked *The Deep Blue Sea* for his 'Teabaggin' in the Kitchen Sink' mini-season of British films ("No one does misery like Terence!"), and they recently had tea together in London. He had also recently liked Andrew Haigh's *45 Years*, which reminded him of Bergman, "but I was hoping someone would vomit!" As I excused myself, he said how much he admired the UK's public film funds, particularly as there is no such system in the US – "I can't believe European directors are just given money to make films."

During the hour-long onstage interview, it was inspiring to revisit his rough, provocative comedy and take in his all-embracing worldview. The DIY approach of his early films and a later toe-dip into the mainstream offer some lessons for aspiring, struggling filmmakers.

Here are my top five takeaways from my one-hour-and-three-minute audience with the pope of trash:

### Build your own Dreamland

Waters didn't go to film school, and never acquired formal skills ("technique is just failed style"). He told the audience that his first short films were so terrible because he didn't understand what editing was: he just projected what he shot, in the order he shot it. He made his films with friends in his parents' bedroom or on a stage in their backyard – this was his Dreamland Studios – blagging illegal camera hires from local teamsters.

He wasn't shooting for a low-budget aesthetic; in fact he wanted all of his films to look good, but style was born out of circumstance.

He regards *Serial Mom* (1993) as his best film, in part because he finally had the budget and star to make the film the way he wanted, but he talked about his early resourcefulness with delight and no sense of hardship. Now that we all have high-resolution cameras and editing tools built into our phones, there's really no excuse (and everyone should watch Sean Baker's brilliant *Tangerine* for a great example of iPhone cinema).

### Have patience, or don't care

"No one liked my films for ten years!"

*Waters talks about challenges and challengers as delightful experiences, not barriers. I could bottle his positivity*



Living the dream: John Waters

Perhaps it's not surprising that it took him so long to emerge from the underground, or to receive his first good review. Nevertheless I got the strong impression that he would have been happy if he had *never* received a positive review for his work, as long as he was making films in the way he wanted to tell them with people he liked and admired.

Even now, despite some mainstream success, the financing is hard to come by, but he's happy to tell his stories on his terms through his writing – and at the BFI he teased a possible TV project.

If you're a storyteller, you'll find a way to squeeze them out.

### Learn the business, and embrace it

One of Waters's most admirable traits is his industry savvy. He encourages all filmmakers to learn the film business inside out, so as to better stay in control. He borrowed money from friends and formed limited companies to make his early films, and retained the distribution rights on all his work until *Polyester* (1981).

As his stock rose, he accepted the conditions that came with finance ("the more money you get, the more you'll have to listen") and he seems to have relished his dalliance with Hollywood: the process of testing his films, run-ins with the censors and the opportunities it gave him to work with stars. He talks about challenges and challengers as delightful experiences, not barriers. I could bottle his positivity.

### Use the press

Notoriety and press stunts were his biggest – and cheapest – asset. Throughout his career he has used the press, good or more often bad, to attract the attention of an audience for his films. And it's undeniably impressive how successfully Waters has branded himself, consciously or otherwise.

### Watch everything

Someone in the audience asked for filmmaking tips for their 12-year-old son. He told them to "show him everything, good or bad, especially the bad". A simple piece of advice, but frequently overlooked. We often say that the best and cheapest film school is a cinema membership and Netflix (and obviously a subscription to *Sight & Sound*). I know this might read like a love letter to John Waters – and his films are not to everyone's taste, or tastelessness. But as a champion of the diverse and disruptive, and a filmmaker of integrity, resourcefulness and pragmatism, he's a role model. [@bfi ben](#)

## IN PRODUCTION

● **Isabelle Huppert** is to star as a former Eurovision entrant, now working in a paté factory in Belgium, who stages a musical comeback, in Flemish director Bavo Defurne's *Souvenir*. Huppert is also reportedly starring in Mia Hansen-Løve's soon-to-shoot *L'Avenir*, alongside Edith Scob, and will shortly be seen in Paul Verhoeven's *Elle* and Pascal Bonitzer's *Tout de suite maintenant*.

● **Paul Greengrass** is working with Danish writer-director Tobias Lindholm on the Berlin Wall drama *The Tunnels*. Lindholm, director of *A Hijacking* (2012) and this year's *A War*, is scripting the film, which Greengrass will direct. It tells the true story of an escape plot hatched by a group of West Germans trying to get loved ones out of East Berlin, with the unlikely help of American news networks.

● **Danis Tanovic**, the Bosnian director best known for 2001's *No Man's Land*, is to begin shooting his next feature, *Invisible*. The London-set film, based on a script by Tena Stivicic, looks at two sides of the malaise of modern life, from the perspective of a Georgian immigrant window cleaner, and a wealthy but depressed executive. The project is being developed by Good Films.

● **João Pedro Rodrigues**, director of the well-received *The Last Time I Saw Macao* (2012), is making *The Ornithologist*, a drama inspired by his own studies of ornithology, which he pursued until switching to filmmaking.

● **William Oldroyd**, who won the Sundance London Short Film competition in 2013 with his film *Best*, is currently shooting his feature debut *Lady Macbeth*. The film, backed in part by the BFI, is scripted by playwright Alice Birch, and retells events from Shakespeare's play in 19th-century England. Florence Pugh, who appeared in Carol Morley's *The Falling*, stars alongside Cosmo Jarvis.

● **Jeff Nichols** (below) has begun shooting *Loving*, his follow-up to 2013's *Mud*. The film is reportedly inspired by Nancy Buirski's documentary *The Loving Story* (2011), about Richard and Mildred Loving, an interracial couple jailed in the late 1950s under Virginia's anti-miscegenation laws.

Nichols's regular collaborator Michael Shannon will play Grey Villet – the *LIFE* magazine photographer who shot iconic images of the couple in 1965 – alongside Ruth Negga, Joel Edgerton, and Nick Kroll.







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Photograph: Carlos Acosta, Principal Guest Artist with The Royal Ballet. Photographed by Sean Hawkey. Image by AKA (©ROH, 2015).



TORONTO

## DIVING FOR PEARLS



**Song of the sea:** Lucile Hadzihalilovic's *Evolution* is a surreal, nightmarish fantasy about a young boy exploring the dark truth of his origins

In a festival that's packed to the gills with new films of variable quality, it takes a little serendipity to unearth the real treasures

**By Nick James**

At Toronto this year, I was grateful that two threads of coincidence tied together some of my viewing because TIFF has to be the most overburdened festival in the world – it has more than 50 press screenings a day for at least a week – so you need serendipity to help you choose.

The first accidental thread was Africa. I saw four worthwhile films in a row that were set there. First was Ben Rivers's *The Sky Trembles and the Earth Is Afraid and the Two Eyes Are Not Brothers*, which takes the idea of a director bossing Moroccan locals about to make an ethnographic film, then marries it to a Paul Bowles short story about a linguist (here substituted by the director) who is taken by bandits and turned into an exotic dancer dressed in a costume made of tin can lids. It's a gorgeous work that lets the landscape fill gaps in the connective flow, but while in the first part the making of the film-within-the-film undercuts the exoticisation of the locals, the Bowles narrative that follows undoes that good work, offering images of a cruel, unknowable foreign culture.

By contrast Cary Fukunaga's *Beasts of No Nation*

is a rare mid-budget war movie with an all-black cast. An unnamed West African nation is riven by civil war, and rebel armies recruit and brutalise child soldiers. Young Agu (Abraham Attah) finds himself orphaned by the regular army and given a join-or-die choice by the rebels. Their leader, the Commandant – Idris Elba on top menacing form – is a capricious, charismatic zealot whose vanity knows no more bounds than his cruelty. Convincing in its portrayal of random slaughter and the drive it puts behind its narrative, *Beasts* suffers only slightly from being a latecomer to the child-soldier issue, already well explored in *Johnny Mad Dog* (2008) and *War Witch* (2012).

The tone of Joachim Lafosse's subtle morality tale *The White Knights* – based on the 2007 Zoé's Ark scandal – is as radically different from *Beasts* as *Beasts* is from *The Sky Trembles*... A crisply dressed NGO team arrives at a mission facility in Chad which they hope to use to tend to war orphans. There's tension from the start between the administrators, led by Jacques (Vincent Lindon), and the medical team, exacerbated by the presence of a sceptical journalist (Valérie Donzelli). Information is imparted reluctantly, leaving us to make up our own minds about the issues that unfold as we detect a potential duplicity behind the mission – just what do they want with these so-called orphans? Few films so deliberately tentative in approach have such revelatory power.

Eva Husson's *Bang Gang* (*A Modern Love Story*)

is only tangentially African – its premise is that teenager Alex (Finnegan Oldfield) is given the run of his archeologist mother's Biarritz house while she goes to Morocco, where its final scene takes place. Sexual yearnings between schoolfriends spill over into dare-fucking, instigated by Alex's spurned one-night stand George (Marilyn Lima) – though it's Alex's reputation that gets enhanced when the orgies become a regular fixture. George attracts the shy, responsible Gabriel (Lorenzo Lefebvre), while Alex gets bored with the success he has playing off one girl against another; then viral video and other viral matters bring the fun to an end. There's a touch of Larry Clark in the shock value of this feature debut, but it is as much about female sexual control as about male manipulation, and it's full of sharp observations.

The second string of connections was to do with my experience of Toronto. I was staying in a downtown tower full of upscale young singles who wouldn't even make eye-contact with each other in the lift – in super-friendly Canada! So Ben Wheatley's long-awaited adaptation of J.G. Ballard's 1975 novel *High-Rise*, about a rapid descent into chaos and psychosis among the inhabitants of a modernist tower block, struck me as a future classic – by which I mean that its icy, forensic brilliance may not be quite in tune with the fuzzy contemporary mood of hope against hope one finds in the UK, but I'd bet it would work with my Toronto liftmates. Tom



Hiddleston lives imperiously on the edge as Dr Laing (a nod to the perennially hip psychiatrist R.D. Laing, author of *The Divided Self*), a newcomer welcomed by the upper and lower strata. Through him we witness the decadence of the penthouse crowd, which provokes an equal descent into primal urges among the lower orders who live further down the block, and whose kids storm the swimming pool during a private reception, precipitating a crisis of violence that proliferates beyond absurdity into the zone of gory mass satire. It's a dazzling riot of a film.

Toronto-style expertise in customer relations – “Are you good?” they ask at breakfast, as you’re blinking your way towards your first thought of the day – enhanced my viewing of Charlie Kaufman and Duke Johnson’s *Anomalisa* (see our Venice festival report, page 17), which ruthlessly mocks such corporate pleasantries and other industrial cant. Johnnie To’s workplace musical *Office* would also chime with the tower-block dwellers. As allergic to memorable melody as most modern musicals (I blame *Les Misérables*), *Office*’s best attributes are William Chang’s stunning sets, its sense of propulsion and its committed performances (from Chow Yun-Fat and Sylvia Chang, among others) as we follow the ups and downs of corporate wrangling between a boss, his mistress, her lover and two bright young things.

Of the films that impressed me outside of the two threads above, the most intellectually engaging was Aleksandr Sokurov’s *Francophonie*, a meditation on the fate of great art in times of danger. It begins with the director trying to contact the captain of a container ship, carrying great art, which is caught in a storm. These communications regularly interrupt the main narrative, about the Nazi invasion of Paris and the arrival at the Louvre of a German officer, an art lover made responsible for its treasures, who’s met by the museum director. Despite potential antipathy, the two conspire to keep the Louvre’s treasures out of the hands of the Nazi bigwigs. In the meantime we’re treated to gorgeous close-ups of some of the Louvre’s greatest paintings, while a pair of actors occasionally pop up as Napoleon and Marianne, the symbol of liberty, both of whom the film could have done without.

The black sands and white cuboid houses of Lanzarote provide the backdrop for my favourite film at the festival, Lucile Hadzihalilovic’s *Evolution*, in which Nicolas (Max Brebant), diving for starfish, thinks he sees the corpse of another small boy. The village is seemingly inhabited only by young mothers, all wearing the same pale gold dress, each with a young lad to nurture. Nicolas’s mother (we assume) dives to prove there’s no drowned boy, returning only with the red starfish he sought. She feeds him bowls of worm-like noodles (or are they noodle-like worms?) and gives him dark-coloured medicine, but his curiosity is now aroused and he begins to uncover the bizarre nature of the sea-spawned species he’s either part of or possibly kidnapped by. The film is rigorously conceptual in its framework yet gloriously sensual and emotional in its execution. It’ll be in my top five of the year, for sure.

In *Chevalier*, Athina Rachel Tsangari takes a full-on anthropological approach to the study of male competitiveness: six men on a boating trip start



**Beasts of No Nation**

*Convincing in its portrayal of slaughter, ‘Beasts of No Nation’ suffers slightly from being a latecomer to the child-soldier issue*

out diving to catch fish but end up competing to settle who is the best at everything. The ensemble playing the nicely variegated bunch of solipsistic manhood are mostly on top deadpan form – although there are delicious moments of hysteria and neurosis. There are some very funny scenes involving assembling flat-pack furniture and lip-synching Minnie Riperton, but the film’s sharpest moments come when the men behave in ways usually considered stereotypically feminine. The momentum drops once the concept becomes too familiar and it’s not quite as original in feel



**Francophonie**

as Tsangari’s breakthrough film *Attenberg*, but it mostly feels as fresh as the fish they catch.

Films about psychopaths getting out of prison fill me with two kinds of dread: the fear of sudden gruesome violence and the greater fear that it will arrive in all too predictable a fashion. The set-up for Robin Pront’s *The Ardennes*, however, feels less well-worn: while Kenny (Kevin Janssens) took the rap for a housebreaking that also involved his girlfriend Sylvie (Veerle Baetens) and brother Dave, the two of them have fallen in love and gone straight. The film’s style is close to early Nicolas Winding Refn. A harsh brutalism hovers over every scene, but there are some unexpected twists and its controlled cool mood builds in effectiveness. File under creditable debut.

It would be hard to find a clearer example of a fine performance lost to a patchy film than *Born to Be Blue*, the Chet Baker biopic that stars Ethan Hawke better than I’ve ever seen him. Hawke incarnates perfectly the ambivalent neurotic ‘cool’ that even Bruce Weber’s excellent Chet documentary *Let’s Get Lost* (1988) found difficult to pin down. Writer-director Robert Budaureau establishes several smart moves to destroy the by-the-numbers feeling most biopics give us. First, he makes it clear he’s not sticking to the facts; second, he takes a slice rather than the whole of the Baker life, focusing on his true-life struggle to regain his trumpet-player’s embouchure after thugs he owed money to kicked out his teeth. Unhappily there are too many instances of music video showboating in Californian locations and the dialogue is forced to explain what’s happening all the time.

Hawke is also good in a more self-deprecating role as the man at the centre of Rebecca Miller’s cheering inverted love triangle comedy *Maggie’s Plan*. Big on New York charm, the film’s conceit is that student counsellor Maggie (Greta Gerwig), who can’t sustain relationships, plans to self-impregnate using an ex-school-chum’s sperm, but Hawke’s John, an unhappy academic, falls in love with her, despite or because of his marriage to the controlling Georgette (Julianne Moore, with a picture-stealing accent that leans toward the Germanic edge of Danish). Fast forward a couple of years and Maggie, despite the daughter she and John are raising, is scheming to get him back together with Georgette. The trio fire off each other magnificently but by the end I was worrying about my own commitment to Gerwig. I love her, I really do, but I need a break – or was it just that tower-block existence fraying my nerves? ☹

## TORONTO TOP TEN

1. **Evolution** Lucile Hadzihalilovic
2. **The White Knights (below)** Joachim La Fosse
3. **Sunset Song** Terence Davies
4. **The Martian** Ridley Scott
5. **High-Rise** Ben Wheatley
6. **Francophonie** Aleksandr Sokurov
7. **The Ardennes** Robin Pront
8. **Chevalier** Athina Rachel Tsangari
9. **Maggie’s Plan** Rebecca Miller
10. **Bang Gang (A Modern Love Story)** Eva Husson





# LIONS FOR LAMBS



House of cards: Wojciech Meczaldowski in Jerzy Skolimowski's audience-tickling, critic-alienating *11 Minutes*

This year's Venice Film Festival had its bland moments – but it was certainly better than the one the Competition jury went to

## By Jonathan Romney

The words you kept hearing at Venice this year were, "It's so relaxed." Venice is indeed a remarkably laid-back festival, with none of the apocalyptic hyperventilation that invariably affects Cannes. In Venice, films are allowed to be just good, or even so-so, without everyone fulminating in outrage when the Seventh Art fails to attain its loftiest peaks. This year, the festival's quiet mood may have had something to do with the fact that Telluride, which overlapped with it, attracted a lot of press attention and several of the same key films. But, while I heard it said several times that the party had moved on, this year's Mostra still attracted the sort of names you want gracing your festival – not just the red-carpet pap magnets, but also major auteurs such as Competition jury members Lynne Ramsay, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Nuri Bilge Ceylan and president Alfonso Cuarón, plus Jonathan Demme, the jury president of the Horizons sidebar, and Brian De Palma, both there also to receive awards.

The latter was also the subject of a documentary, *De Palma*, by Noah Baumbach and Jake Paltrow – an extensive single-talking-head job with illustrations, but extremely revealing and often very funny, De Palma being one for telling it like it is. And no one can complain that Venice isn't a proper cinephile fest: there's a prize for Best Documentary on Cinema (which went to Yves Montmayeur's slight but entertaining *The 1000 Eyes of Dr Maddin*, about the wizard of Winnipeg), and one for Best Restored Film (Pasolini's *Salò*).

So, plenty to be content with – except that the Competition jury seemed to have been attending a different festival from the rest of us. There was quite clearly a Golden Lion frontrunner



Charlie Kaufman and Duke Johnson's *Anomalisa*

that was in a league of its own in terms of imagination, innovation and insight into the human condition – more on that anon – but it wasn't Lorenzo Vigas's *From Afar*, which scooped the prize. This Venezuelan debut drama was pretty good – but the film felt too low-key and in some ways overfamiliar to merit quite so intense a spotlight. Set in Caracas, it involves a middle-aged man, Armando, who pays young men to come to his flat, where he masturbates while watching them, as per the title, at a distance. Armando is played by Alfredo Castro, whose unnerving presence has been at the centre of several films by Chile's Pablo Larraín; the DP is Larraín's regular collaborator Sergio Armstrong, whose intriguingly 'off' palette of olives and soured pastels places the film at a certain remove from its realist point of departure. Castro's minimalist reserve is typically mesmerising, although his enigmatic style is a hair away from becoming a mannerism. Non-professional newcomer Luis Silva is also a face to watch, as the street-smart pick-up who offers more intimacy than Armando is comfortable with.

*From Afar* certainly had more to offer than the Latin American winner of the Silver Bear for Best Direction: Pablo Trapero's *The Clan*. The Argentinian director has never made a bad film, but his career has reached the point at which his



inclusion in a competition has a sort of meat-and-potatoes predictability. *The Clan* is an involving true-crime thriller set in the Galtieri years, about a family that runs a clandestine kidnapping racket; but its tensions, ironies and political resonances are awkwardly undermined by a faux-Scorsesean pop soundtrack. It's not bad, but mould-breaking direction isn't the first thing that comes to mind.

No complaints, really, about the Lion of the Future award to Brady Corbet for his *The Childhood of a Leader*. You'll know actor Corbet as the American of choice for Euro art movies (*Force Majeure*, *Eden*, *Saint Laurent* and *Clouds of Sils Maria* last year alone). His austere and surprisingly formal costume piece, inspired by a Sartre short story, was not just his directing debut but, somewhat self-consciously, his Major Statement. Shot in enveloping darkness by Lol Crawley, the film concerns a strong-willed child whose tantrums disrupt the meetings for the Treaty of Versailles, and pave the way, apparently, to his becoming a fascist leader. Visually striking but dramatically ponderous, the film maintains a studiously sombre register (shades of Pialat's 1987 *Under the Sun of Satan*). A deranged *non sequitur* of a coda was either masterful or ludicrous, but either way it stopped you in your tracks. I can't say I liked much about this film – apart from the marrow-chilling orchestral score by Scott Walker – but for sheer nerve and ambition, Corbet deserves at least one of his two prizes here (the other was Horizon's Best Director).

I wasn't present for the whole festival, and topping and tailing my visit meant missing a few much-admired Competition titles – notably Tom McCarthy's *Spotlight*, Cary Fukunaga's *Beasts of No Nation* and Aleksandr Sokurov's *Francofonia* (for these last two, see our Toronto review, page 16) I particularly regret missing *Behemoth* by Zhao Liang, apparently a very distinctive docu-essay mapping the *Divine Comedy* on to images of economic and social change in contemporary China.

In a mixed Competition, Drake Doremus's futuristic romance *Equals* must rank among cinema's most insipid dystopias ever. Jerzy Skolimowski's *11 Minutes* tickled audiences and alienated critics, but this fragmented multi-strander was no more or less than an intricate house of cards designed to be knocked down spectacularly at the end; as such, good value. And Atom Egoyan's *Remember* was less idiosyncratic than usual (scripted not by the director but by Benjamin August), yet offered an intelligent thriller take on a combination of themes that could easily have made for a deeply awkward result: dementia and the Holocaust. Christopher Plummer's performance was both commanding and moving, and he would have made a better choice for the male acting prize than Fabrice Luchini, doing his trademarked curmudgeon in Christian Vincent's merely solid *L'Hermine*. Another prime candidate for that award was surely Ralph Fiennes, exuberantly bumptious as a motormouthed music-biz veteran – opposite Tilda Swinton in a near-silent role as a singer! – in Luca Guadagnino's *A Bigger Splash*, a quasi-remake of Jacques Deray's *La Piscine*. It's not in the same grand Viscontian mode as the director's *I Am Love*, but incorporates many of his flourishes into what



The assassin's bullet: Amos Gitai's *Rabin, the Last Day*

*Amos Gitai's most forceful work in some time, 'Rabin, the Last Day' deserves to be the focus of heated argument*

seems initially a simple comedy of manners; it was certainly one of the most enjoyable films here.

Two other Competition titles were inexplicably overlooked in the awards. Laurie Anderson's deeply personal *Heart of a Dog* was a

seemingly free-associative docu-essay, fanning out from her late dog Lolabelle to take in thoughts on death and mourning, Wittgenstein, Buddhism and the artist's childhood. It was a wise, witty and deeply touching film, although some may find it unpalatably precious; I loved it, and I'm not even a fan. This was, incidentally, a good year for essay films: the Venice Days sidebar contained Grant Gee's *Innocence of Memories*, an exploration of the psychogeographic imagination of, and the Istanbul museum opened by, Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk. It was at once an evocative nocturnal reverie and a tantalising portrait in negative of a literary master.

The other overlooked Competition contender was Amos Gitai's *Rabin, the Last Day*, about the assassination of Israeli PM Yitzhak Rabin in 1995. A sober docudrama inquiry with a detached stance suggestive of verbatim theatre, Gitai's film eschewed wild conspiracy theory but teasingly suggested that there were right-wing interests in the mix that made Rabin more easily accessible to his killer, Orthodox radical Yigal Amir. Gitai's most forceful work in some time, it deserves to be the focus of heated argument.

Finally, the film for which the 72nd Mostra will most be remembered received the Grand Jury Prize – no small honour, yet one that arguably short-changed it. *Anomalisa* is an animation film directed by Charlie Kaufman and stop-motion specialist Duke Johnson. It's about a motivational speaker (voiced by David Thewlis) who visits a Cincinnati hotel and has a liaison with a gauche young woman from Ohio (voiced by Jennifer Jason Leigh); everyone else is voiced in the same eerie leaden drone by Tom Noonan. There are some characteristically surreal Kaufman touches, but the film's brilliance lies above all in exploring the weary mundanity of the Western everyday, and the way corporatised discourse is eroding our souls. The closer the film comes to drab reality, the stranger it feels, not least because the puppets – which are very manifestly puppets – offer an eerie distorting mirror of the characters' humanity. *Anomalisa* is a nightmare movie of the subtlest kind, and in a perverse way, the most trenchantly realistic film here. **S**

## VENICE TOP TEN

1. **Anomalisa**  
Charlie Kaufman & Duke Johnson
2. **Heart of a Dog (below)** Laurie Anderson
3. **Rabin, the Last Day** Amos Gitai
4. **A Bigger Splash** Luca Guadagnino
5. **Innocence of Memories** Grant Gee
6. **De Palma** Noah Baumbach & Jake Paltrow
7. **Janis: Little Girl Blue** Amy Berg
8. **Remember** Atom Egoyan
9. **The Event** Sergei Loznitsa
10. **From Afar** Lorenzo Vigas





# BLOOD SPORT

The dominant theme at this year's festival seemed to be the sense of being trapped, mentally, physically or, most often, both

**By Kim Newman**

For its 15th annual edition, Film4 FrightFest continued its blob-like growth to take in more venues – spilling out of the Vue West End to recolonise its original home, the Prince Charles Cinema – and add more strands, more screens, more films... to the extent that even the most dedicated weekend-pass-holder could only manage to see a third of the movies on offer at the festival. The overkill is part of the experience – with some films or even premises, such as the one about the wormhole that sucks shower curtains into a Lovecraftian limbo (*Curtain*) or Steve Oram's suburban-set reinvention of Hammer Films' 'akita akita' caveman movies (AAAAAAAH!), working best if slipped into a barrage of movie-viewing to elicit a sense that this might be a dream brought on by exhaustion, unreeling on the inside of the eyelids rather than projected digitally on a screen. As always, FrightFest is a way of taking stock of what's going on in the genre in any given year, with fads and preoccupations and weird coincidences making for an increasingly intricate series of interconnections between disparate titles across all streams of programming.

The dominant theme of this year's horror would seem to be a sense of being trapped or confined, whether physically or mentally or, most often, both. On offer were films about people trapped in vehicles (*Rabid Dogs*, *Curve*, *The Sand*, *Howl*), houses or apartments (*Bite*, *Shut In*, *The Diabolical*, *Estranged*, *Slumlord*), standing on a landmine (*Landmine Goes Click*), nailed to a classroom desk (*The Lesson*), abducted in the service of office politics (*Scherzo Diabolico*), besieged by a giant insect (*Stung*) or demon children (*Hellions*), and trapped in a closet (*Inner Demon*). The most interesting of these are the movies which wed the suspense mechanics of confinement with a psychological or metaphysical trap. British cinema offered Gez Medinger and Robin Schmidt's *AfterDeath*, in which the characters are in limbo after their deaths and facing the threat of an eternity in hell, and the Blaine brothers' unusual ghost story *Nina Forever*, in which the eponymous bloody naked spectre manifests whenever her surviving boyfriend tries to move on and have sex with his new love interest. In an American indie vein, Mickey Keating's *Pod* and Perry Blackshear's *They Look Like People* address a free-form modern paranoia as their protagonists feel compelled to try to help a recalcitrant brother or best friend who is convinced that alien infiltrators are among us.

Recent perennial forms show some signs of slacking off, though – among a small clutch of found-footage films – *JeruZalem* makes very interesting use (sure to be imitated) of Google Glasses to document an apocalyptic event in the old town of Jerusalem (complete with startling demons), and the flagging zombie apocalypse was made fresh again by Kyle Rankin's female-led



Three's a crowd: the ghost of an ex-girlfriend haunts a couple in the Blaine brothers' *Nina Forever*

*The festival's growth meant that even the most dedicated weekend-pass-holder could only manage to see a third of the movies on offer*

comedy *Night of the Living Deb*. Vampires were confined to one lonely tucked-away-late-at-night comedy (*Bloodsucking Bastards*), but Bernard Rose's *Frankenstein* – and, to a lesser extent, David Gelb's *The Lazarus Effect* – administers an electric charge to another of the genre's hardest myths. Shot digitally in contemporary Los Angeles locations, Rose's adaptation of Mary Shelley's novel (and James Whale's films) is a major addition to the *Frankenstein* filmography and likely to be a much discussed next year, on the 200th anniversary of the *ménage* at Villa Diodati that unchained the Modern Prometheus.

Nina of *Nina Forever* and anti-bullying crusader Moira of Adam Egypt Mortimer's *Some Kind of*

*Hate* embody fresh takes on the archetype of the avenging female ghost, as does the semi-possessed actress of Takashi Miike's *Over Your Dead Body*, the latest of many screen incarnations of the Japanese classic *The Ghost of Yotsuya* (1959). This year, it seems that many makers of horror films have been catching up on their academic feminism and a wide range of movies address the mythic figure – as identified by critics Carol J. Clover, Vera Diker and others – of the horror movie heroine, with Tyler Shields's *Final Girl*, Jeffery Scott Lando's *Suspension* and Benjamin R. Moody's *Last Girl Standing* looking afresh at the survivor girl and answering the question of the original *Texas Chain Saw* tagline, "Who will survive and what will be left of them?" Ben Cresciman's *Sun Choke* and Jon Knautz's *Goddess of Love* explore the interior minds of crazy ladies a couple of generations on from *Repulsion* (1965), offering varying contexts for insanity.

That all this connects with the classical gothic is proved by a trio of British movies. In Adam Levins's *Estranged*, an amnesiac heiress (Amy Manson) is returned to a crumbling estate and a family she can't remember but distrusts, only to be drawn into a cruel scheme to secure an inheritance. This is the strongest of several films dealing with fears of pregnancy – teen pregnancy has a satanic aspect in David Keating's *Cherry Tree* and Bruce McDonald's *Hellions* – but also ties in with a pleasingly disreputable British strain of up-to-the-minute economic horror represented by Mark Murphy's *Awaiting*, about captivity and heredity on an isolated farm, and Dominic Brunt's *Bait*, in which a payday moneylender is inflated into a relentless horror film psychopath pitted against a plucky, mature pair of under-the-debt-hammer final girls. **S**



Gez Medinger and Robin Schmidt's *AfterDeath*



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**THE OUTSIDER**  
In *Crimson Peak*, Mia Wasikowska (right) plays Edith Cushing, an American at the turn of the 20th century who is lured to the Lake District to Allerdale Hall, a house Guillermo del Toro (left, on set) had built from scratch for the film

# GHOST HUNTER

*A return to the gothic preoccupations of 'Pan's Labyrinth' and 'The Devil's Backbone', Guillermo del Toro's 'Crimson Peak' is an ornate, carnal examination of a young American woman in the early 20th century looking to lay her childhood fears to rest*

**By Mar Diestro-Dópido**

**Can we ever shed the ghosts of our past?** Leave behind the monsters of our childhood? These questions haunt Guillermo del Toro's much anticipated new film *Crimson Peak*, in which the cult Mexican director once again gives the gothic his own unique spin. It's been nine years since his last gothic outing, the second of what he considers his two most personal films, the internationally lauded *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), companion to *The Devil's Backbone* (2001). In *Crimson Peak* he pays lavish homage to all those ghosts that populate the gothic imagination, with references to classics such as *Rebecca*, *Wuthering Heights* and Poe's *House of Usher*, as well as through ethereal traces of his own work; and in so doing strives to reassert that, in the words of his protagonist, "Ghosts do exist. This much I know."

A profoundly sensual, ornate, carnal gothic romance set at the turn of the 20th century, *Crimson Peak* centres on a love triangle that has protagonist Edith (Mia Wasikowska) at its apex. A young forward-thinking writer with a flair for ghost stories, Edith finds herself caught between two opposing worlds – the brash modernity of North America where she lives, full of light, enterprise and reason; and the dark, old, secret-filled world of the English aristocracy in the shape of a mysterious baronet, Sir Thomas Sharpe (Tom Hiddleston), and his icy sister, Lady Lucille (Jessica Chastain), who lure her to the damp greyness of their ancestral pile in the Lake District.

That home, the once grandiose but now decaying Allerdale Hall, is fast sinking into the crimson









clay that gives the film its title; at once a symbol of the disintegration of a way of life, a backward-looking mindset, and imprisonment within a suffocating family history. A character in its own right, the house literally breathes and aches and spits blood. It was constructed for the film from scratch, with every prop – teacups, doorknobs, dresses, portraits and an exquisitely nightmarish lift – handcrafted from designs conceived by del Toro; apposite in a film where the most potent weapon, in more ways than one (and for Edith especially), turns out to be the transformative power of creation itself.

Del Toro's own creative triumph in *Crimson Peak* lies in reconfiguring a well-trodden genre on his own terms, giving a fresh slant to gothic tropes – be they from literature, art or cinema – so that it's the female protagonists driving the narrative this time round. Despite directly passing from her father to her husband – an inevitable trajectory for a woman at the time – by necessity she must actively shape her own fate. Likening herself to Mary Shelley, Edith finds that it is her capacity to draw on her own past, in order to square up to the monsters in her present, that enables her to move forward. For, as she says to Thomas: "You keep on looking for me in the past. But I'm here, in the present."

**Mar Diestro-Dópidio:** You wrote the story for *Crimson Peak* back in 2006 with Matthew Robbins. Why did it take so long to get made?

**Guillermo del Toro:** I wanted to make it right after *Pan's Labyrinth*, but two things detained it. One was that I wanted it to be R rated. I knew that at the heart of the movie there were concerns that were very adult for me, sexually and psychologically, and visually there were moments of violence and eroticism that were not going to be PG-13. And secondly I knew I wanted to make it for \$50 million, and not 20, not 30, because I wanted to build the house, I wanted to do the wardrobe, because I wanted to hide several clues of the story and the characters in the wardrobe and the sets. I wanted to make it like a living painting. And it took eight years for someone, in this case Legendary Pictures, to come back to me and say, "Here's the money and we're OK with the R rating."

**MDD:** Unusually for your gothic films, *Crimson Peak* is about adults rather than children – we see the ten-year-old Edith only briefly.

**GDT:** It's a curious thing because although there are no kids, in reality the stories of both the protagonist [Edith] and the antagonists [Lucille and Thomas] are firmly rooted in childhood. Edith we see in the opening as a little kid. But then we hear innumerable times about the childhood of Thomas and Lucille; the whole point of the movie is to show that the real horror was that childhood. I gave the house windows that look like eyes and the house almost becomes all those ancestors watching over them. And then you see Lucille and Thomas as children in a very strange mural in the attic. So it is still rooted in childhood. I wanted very much to talk about this Chinese puzzle box of abuse that is the family, this ancestral horror of a family passing the poison from one generation to the next – that was interesting to me.

**MDD:** The house not only literally breathes, but it's as if it gets bigger or smaller depending on Edith's emotional state.

**GDT:** Yes, and the proportions of Edith too. Edith looks so small when she is afraid because I put her in a giant sofa, but when she is more in charge the sofa looks smaller, be-



**MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN**  
Tom Hiddleston plays Sir Thomas Sharpe (above, with Wasikowska's Edith) and Jessica Chastain plays Lady Lucille (below, right), a pair of siblings scarred by the horrors of their childhood

cause I actually made it in two sizes. And I made two sizes of the teacups. So she has one giant teacup when she's feeling vulnerable and a smaller one when she gets stronger. We actually did that with the bed too – we did giant pillows and giant bed covers to make her look almost like a character out of a fairytale, a little girl in the bed.

**MDD:** Why did you choose to place the story in this particular period – the turn of the century at the transition from Victorian to Edwardian – and to contrast the US with the UK, the New World with the Old.

**GDT:** It's a crucial moment. When Henry James was discussing gothic romance, and I'm paraphrasing here, he said it was essentially about ghosts that represent the past, or the incapacity to move into the future without vanquishing them. And I thought it was a very interesting time because in 1901 Buffalo, New York, and America in general were practically futuristic. In 1901 Buffalo was the most electrified city in the world. Edith is using a typewriter, we see cars on the streets, we can hear the constant traffic of trains in the distance, there's a telegraph, we hear phones ringing everywhere. And even though she's seen a ghost, Edith has an incredibly modern, almost futuristic attitude towards her femininity. Then she travels to a world that is frozen in time. In fact we made that point in the design of Thomas and Lucille's clothes – they are 10 or 15 years older than anybody else's because they are their parents' clothes.

So the idea was: can I pose Edith as the future, trying to break with the past and the guilt and the horror of that family? This was crucial for me, since it was such a female-centric movie in my mind. I wanted her not to be rescued by the hero, but for her to rescue the hero.

**MDD:** In many ways it seems your most complex film, narratively and thematically.

**GDT:** I made three decisions that were completely counter to making the movie more accessible, or commercially easy. One decision was to make it female-centric, which curiously enough really makes the movie sit very weirdly with male audiences. Female audiences engage with the movie very strongly, but males actually seem unhappy to see that every male figure in the movie is kind of useless. They cannot get their head around it.

The second decision was that as the movie progresses,



instead of applauding and having a rah-rah moment when the villains are finally confronted, I thought, like I did in *Devil's Backbone*, that they would actually reveal their humanity, that you would understand them a little more towards the end.

The third thing I rejected that would have made the movie easily more commercial was that I decided, like I did in *Devil's Backbone*, that I would not cheat and have a Judaeo-Christian sense of evil for the ghosts, that I would not say they were evil ghosts, or demonic ghosts, or that the house was possessed. I wanted to reveal little by little that they were trying to help Edith, the way Santi was trying to help the boys in *Devil's Backbone*.

**MDD:** One of the most recognisable traits of your work is precisely the humanity you give to the ghosts and monsters. That's reflected in the effects you use to create them – they are ethereal here, but much fleshier than a CGI-generated image, like a mix of flesh, bones, spirit and smoke.

**GDT:** I wanted the movie to feel handmade. I wanted people to realise that they are not in a digital set, that we actually built the house. I wanted people to sense that we painstakingly hand-made those dresses. And, in fact, Lucille and Thomas's clothes are hand-stitched, in contrast to the American wardrobe which is machine-stitched. I wanted people to have a sense that it was almost like an opera, that everything had been created, slightly exaggerated, but beautifully enhanced. I wanted the ghosts to be unlike any other ghosts you've ever seen, so I decided I would use actors and make-up. I then said to the digital effects guys, "Let's find a way to make them translucent, without having to shoot them against a green screen." I wanted them to be on set with the actors. We came up with a very simple but nice solution and created a little black box of photogrammetry that reproduces the background. Then we animated a skeleton inside the bodies, like we did with Santi in *Devil's Backbone*, and I made their body a little more liquid, so when they move they leave

traces of their body around. That way it's a perfect mixture of make-up and digital effects, because it's 50/50.

**MDD:** *Crimson Peak* seems the most lavish and beautiful film you have made. Why was this so important for you?

**GDT:** I have a nostalgia for the big Hollywood gothic romance, like Robert Stevenson's *Jane Eyre* [1943] or Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* [1940] or the beautiful production of *Great Expectations* [1946] by David Lean. But I have an almost painful realisation that for many people horror or anything gothic means a B movie and that no one has produced anything that's as operatic as those films in at least 30 years. I wanted to make this opulent sort of operatic movie because gothic romance is about excess, albeit a very controlled sense of excess – in the acting, in the *mise en scène*.

I made it clear to the cinematographer [Dan Laustsen] that we were creating the opposite of the desaturation that normally goes with period pieces. We were going to be really saturated. The one movie I watched a lot was *The Leopard* [1963]. I really studied the way Visconti shot the dancers, and the way he controlled the colour palette. And then I said to my cinematographer, we are going to move the camera as if it were very heavy. We won't be chasing people around; it's going to be very stately, like we are on tracks or a dolly, even if we use the Steadicam.

**MDD:** It's very striking the way you've colour-coded the film.

**Edith seems almost preserved in amber, especially when she's in England in that cold, inhospitable house.**

**GDT:** We were talking about beauty, and for me beauty is part of the language of a film. Beauty is not eye-candy – it is like protein, it needs to contain something nutritious, a narrative. I wanted very much to encapsulate America in that golden period, and then transition with Edith, who remains golden, to this very cold, north of England decrepit mansion. Little by little her colours are leached out until she is in white; they are literally sucking the blood out of her. I wanted the past to be represented

*I have a nostalgia for the big Hollywood gothic romance, like Stevenson's 'Jane Eyre', Hitchcock's 'Rebecca' or Lean's beautiful 'Great Expectations'*





by the colour red, which is the clay of the house and at the same time is the blood of the earth. It is about these aristocrats effectively sucking the blood out of the earth until it dries and even then, refusing to let it go. The movie is divided into two – a golden passage which is modernity, and then a cyan blue passage which is Allerdale Hall. In the middle you have the colour red linking Lucille to the ghosts, to the ground.

But in the case of Edith I really wanted to posit something that concerns me, which is that beauty is as isolating as ugliness. Because when a woman possesses beauty in the way that she carries herself, the way that she presents herself to the world, that's instantly equated with weakness. And most people cannot see past that beauty in the same way that most people cannot see past ugliness. In many Greek trials the innocence or the culpability of the accused was decided on the physical appearance. The judges would look at the two parties and they would absolve the beautiful party.

**MDD: Are there any autobiographical elements in the film?**

**GDT:** *Crimson Peak* is like a throwback to the Hollywood productions that I saw as a kid. The first ever movie I saw in my life, when I was four years old, was *Wuthering Heights* in the lap of my mother. So that is very present in the film. *Crimson Peak* has a lot of personal little things that were secret until now; the opening memory, the girl in the bed – that actually happened to my mother. My mother was in bed after the funeral of her grandmother whom she loved, and she heard footsteps and felt the soft whisper of the fabric, the silk of her grandmother's dress, as she entered the room. She sensed her perfume, she heard and felt the weight of her on the bed and the bed springs creaked. She felt her grandmother embrace her. She screamed and ran away from the room.

And I've had two ghost encounters in my life, the second of which is in the movie. When I was scouting locations for *The Hobbit* in New Zealand, I stayed in a haunted hotel and I heard this horrible murder in the room. In the middle of the night I heard the screams of a woman being killed and a man sobbing. That's the murder in the bathroom that Edith hears in the house. And many other little details... I identify with all the characters. I am the father, Edith, Thomas, I am everyone, and they all have traces of my emotional biography in there.

**MDD: This is the most gothic of your films, but do you think it also has a Mexican dimension?**

**GDT:** Normally the Anglo-Saxon approach to a ghost story – even in the best cases, like M.R. James – is an approach that sees the rational clashing with the supernatural. On the other hand, in *Crimson Peak* there's a full-blown acceptance of the ghosts being real from the first ten seconds of the film. There is a postulate that opens the movie that says, "Ghosts are real. This much I know." That's a very Mexican thing to say. The violence and the passion of *Crimson Peak* is very Latin; the relationship with stabbing in particular as a means of death is extremely Mexican. And ultimately, there is a very intimate relationship with melodrama, which is almost a signature part of the Mexican culture – the explosive passions that run underneath the very Anglo-Saxon façade of characters like Lucille.

**MDD: This is also the most starry cast you've worked with. Could you talk a little about how you work with your actors.**

**GDT:** What I do is write an eight- to ten-page biography

of each character and tell the actors what they like and dislike. Then I give them a very detailed narrative of their life and each actor gets a secret they don't reveal to anyone. For example, Lucille's secret is that she wants to remain in Allerdale Hall forever; Thomas's secret is that he wants to leave – so they are playing opposite forces. After that I keep it very much in the moment, because I don't want to give complex instructions during the shoot. I direct by giving them a verb, never a noun. So I go to them and say, "You are in a hurry." "You are manipulating her." "You are watching the tea, you are not watching her." For example, the place where the verb is most obvious is in the porridge-feeding scene [when Lucille is nursing Edith]. We could have had that happen with dialogue, but I felt it was more interesting for Lucille to be feeding Edith in a really violent way, almost like penetration with the spoon. Lucille uses the spoon like a stabbing weapon, almost. So in that way you give the actor something to do rather than something to think about.

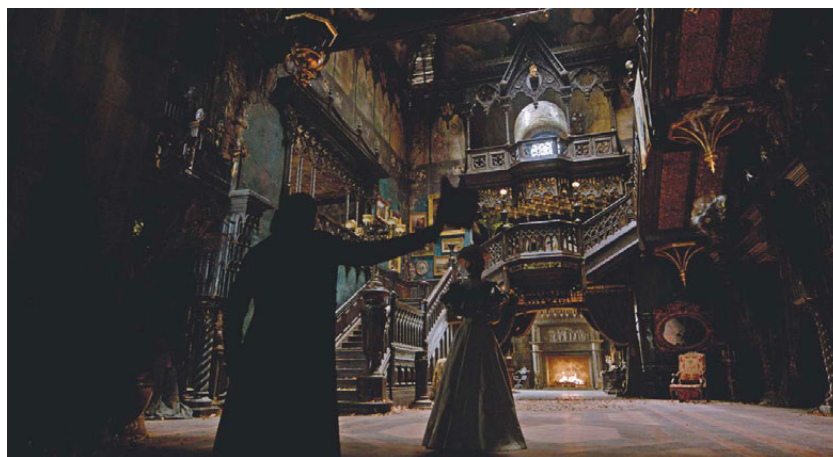
**MDD: Is there anything you wanted to do in this film that you weren't able to?**

**GDT:** Not really. Whatever shortcomings there are in the film are entirely mine. After the fact I see everything that I could have done better. But it's too late, you have to accept it, you cannot reshoot this or reshoot that. But it is one of the top three films in my affections. *The Devil's Backbone*, *Pan's Labyrinth* and *Crimson Peak* are the three movies I feel are the closest to being what I dreamt they could be. ☺

**i** *Crimson Peak* is released in UK cinemas on 16 October and will be reviewed in the next issue

*Beauty is as isolating as ugliness. Most people cannot see past that beauty in the same way most people cannot see past ugliness*

**HOUSE OF PAIN**  
Allerdale Hall (below), which literally breathes, aches and spits blood in the film, is a central component of the tale, and every prop was handcrafted from designs conceived by del Toro



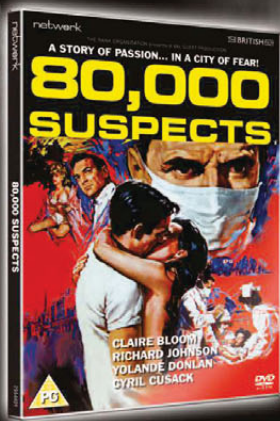
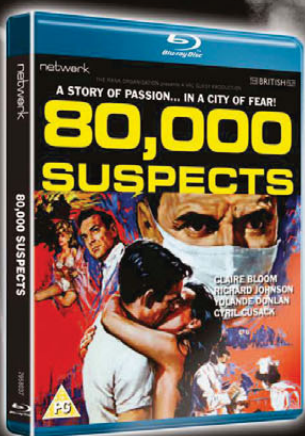


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# ANIMAL INSTINCTS

*A surreal tale of a world where singletons are forced to pair up or face being turned into animals, Yorgos Lanthimos's 'The Lobster' offers an oblique, blackly comic look at a group of rebels resisting society's pressure to conform — just don't think it's a comment on Greece's plight, says the director*

**By Trevor Johnston**





**THE DATING GAME**  
Colin Farrell as David in  
*The Lobster* – above,  
with *Nosebleed Woman*  
(Jessica Barden); right,  
with *Short Sighted*  
*Woman* (Rachel Weisz)

**Were it not for the fact** Michael Haneke got there first, ‘Funny Games’ would surely be an apposite title for a Yorgos Lanthimos film. Now a decade into a career that’s received burgeoning international recognition and sundry film festival awards, the Greek writer-director has been busily marking out his own cinematic territory, full of curious coteries, absurd rules and seemingly inevitable mischief. *Dogtooth* (2009), his breakthrough second feature, conjured up a household purposely kept at arm’s length from the outside world, creating an experiential void filled by childish dares and pointless rewards, self-determining mythologies and a reconfigured relationship between words and things. *Alps* (2011), his follow-up, was so named because if you’re going to have a story about a group of hospital workers training to play-act the roles of the recently deceased in order to bring comfort to their bereaved, then naturally that’s what they’d call themselves. At least in Lanthimos’s world of free-improv logic.

The frolics, as you might expect, continue with *The Lobster*, his first English-language project after moving his base from Athens to London. The film seemingly marks a new filmmaking chapter for him, bringing together his key Greek collaborators (screenwriter Efthymis Filippou, director of photography Thimios Bakatakis and editor Yorgos Mavropsaridis) with a new production company (ever-enterprising Irish outfit Element Pictures) and a marquee-value international cast – including Colin Farrell, Rachel Weisz, John C. Reilly and *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* co-star Léa Seydoux. If the performers bring their own commercial appeal, Lanthimos and Filippou’s approach to the material shows no sign of soft-centred compromise, instead putting their deliberately unsettling contrariness to use in shaping a dystopian alternative society obviously offering a broader canvas than their previous Greek-based creations.

In these parts, being single is an offence. When quietly ordinary Colin Farrell’s marriage breaks down, he knows what’s in store, and is soon part of a police round-up shipping all the other singletons to a country hotel where they undergo a rigorous programme of mingling with the aim of getting them paired off again. Same-sex relationships are not permitted, and any new hetero couples must subsequently prove their compatibility over a sustained testing period. Meanwhile, those who remain resolutely unattached, and thus of no social value, are essentially ‘recycled’ – transformed into an animal of their choice (hence the crustacean title, which is Farrell’s nominated fate, for reasons we won’t spoil here). In common with Lanthimos’s previous output, this whole fanciful edifice seems to hint at the rituals society constructs for itself in the hope of dissipating deep-rooted fears via routine, comforting patterns of interaction. Here, the underlying anxiety is the tyranny of coupledness as a bulwark against loneliness, whereas previously *Alps* explored the need for familial identity in relation to the ongoing anxiety of loss, and *Dogtooth* pondered whether protecting children from a corrupt world might be even more damaging than exposing them to it. Which prompts the question: do these ritualised games make lives better or make them worse?

In *The Lobster*, different characters adopt different coping strategies as a splendidly officious Olivia Colman lays out the hotel’s many rules. Farrell evades the attentions of a fellow solo female even though he knows there’ll be consequences, while his fellow guest John C. Reilly discovers the brutal penalty for a sneaky wank, and their fretful pal Ben Whishaw ends up beating himself about the head so he can claim a common interest in

nosebleeds with winsome and available Jessica Barden (billed as ‘Nosebleed Woman’). There’s a bracingly absurd comic element to all this, which might remind viewers of early Monty Python or even the skewed wit of 70s Luis Buñuel, though on a more serious level the spectacle of lives circling in an awful holding pattern doesn’t seem so far removed from Tsai Ming-liang’s particular terrain. The overall effect is openly suggestive enough to throw up myriad reference points (early Atom Egoyan, anyone?), none of which will get you very far when you mention them to Lanthimos himself, since he makes it very clear early on in our conversation that his creative process just doesn’t function like that.

“What we start with, and by ‘we’ I mean Efthymis my co-writer and myself, isn’t a story we want to tell or some list of references, but a situation, a condition that we observe,” he explains by Skype from the Toronto hotel room where he’s just arrived for the film’s North American debut at the festival. “So we begin to explore that situation, those systems. The things that we take for granted. The rules that we follow and nobody questions. The way we’re educated. Everything that’s in place already and we feel we have to abide by.”

In this instance, however, it wasn’t necessarily the religious endorsement of the institution of marriage, the ubiquitous cultural enforcement screaming at us that ‘One is the loneliest number’ and ‘It takes two, baby’, nor even the modern paraphernalia of pairing off – the dating apps, matching-up websites, and so on – but the root impulses bringing individuals together in the first place. “No, it was definitely something more elemental we were thinking about,” reflects the 42-year-old, who served his time making commercials before getting his



2005 first feature *Kinetta* (another hotel-set story about obsessive behaviour patterns) into production. “The ways and means have changed over time, from letters to the telephone to email and apps, but it’s all really about the human race’s seemingly basic need for communication, and how that impacts on the way we interact. What are the main rules, the main concerns and problems that people face in trying to adapt themselves to the systems they’ve created to regulate that part of their lives?”

In person, the affable Lanthimos comes across as a wry, slightly cerebral observer of human foibles, quick to deliver the odd ironic chuckle, but also someone more apt to ask questions than issue direct statements. “I don’t like anything didactic,” he says. “Whether it’s films or books or people – especially when it’s people telling you how things are supposed to be. So I’m just not going to do that with one of my own films. What if it’s not





ideal how society has arranged our lives? Where would it lead if we went to an extreme in the other direction? That's what interests me. To try and get people energised in that sort of thought process."

Such words and attitudes don't seem that far removed from the sentiments uttered by many of Lanthimos's compatriots in Greece's recent stand-off against the seemingly monolithic power of the European economic system, but he wastes no time in batting that one away, hinting with a slightly resigned air that he's tiring of journalists' ongoing attempts to make his unsettling output somehow emblematic of the turmoil in his native land. "I guess it's just part of that whole way the media engages with film these days," he says, sighing. "Sure, there's something charming about the idea of a national cinema evolving into a movement – the whole Greek Wave thing, which may or may not exist. Then the idea of trying to link that to whatever social events are happening in the country at the time. Whether these connections are real, it still feels interesting to make them. But then again I've just made a film which investigates absolutely universal subject matter, uses actors from all over the world, and has as much to do with Ireland and the UK as it does Greece. If you removed the credits, and the audience didn't know who the director was, nobody would even think to connect it to anything going on in Greece. So how valid are those connections?"

Point taken, though it does still seem fair to say there's a common thread in his work, tracing characters who are out to disrupt or find their own variation on the systems and values they see in front of them, the modestly insurgent Colin Farrell in *The Lobster* being the latest to define themselves through resistance rather than conformity. Lanthimos though, prefers to think it's somewhat more nuanced than that: "He is a rebel, of sorts, but in the end you see him getting sucked into a similar situation to the one he seemed to be wholly set against. So that's the irony, whether there actually is another choice even if you set out to try and do something different. Can we, after all, escape our own nature, or is it our nature that defines the way we are?"

What he's referring to here takes up the second half of *The Lobster*, where it's not giving too much away to reveal that Farrell finds himself in the midst of an outcast community of singles foraging for themselves in the woods – and so determined to assert their identity as defiant individuals that there are harsh penalties for anything that could be construed as romantic fraternisation. Needless to say, there's a girl... played by Rachel Weisz in a contribution so strikingly affecting and unadorned it shows the value of Lanthimos's avowed Bressonian approach to performance, encouraging his cast to intuitively embody the story's emotional content through their physical presence rather than projecting it using well-honed acting technique. 'Uncertainty' is the key word here, reckons Lanthimos, who dispensed with the usual fripperies of character backstories and would often use rehearsal takes to capture the cast's first instincts. "I'd call it a positive sense of uncertainty, because it brings a complexity to the situation if actors are brave enough to explore that, not to fall back on what they know, not protect their insecurity. I cast Rachel Weisz and I was impressed when I realised how far she would go in her ability to



*What if it's not ideal how society has arranged our lives? Where would it lead if we went to an extreme in the other direction? That's what interests me*

**SMART MONEY**  
The career of director Yorgos Lanthimos (above) has taken a new turn now that actors of the calibre of Ben Whishaw (below), Rachel Weisz and Colin Farrell are choosing to work with him, enabling him to raise funds for his projects more easily




lose control – and actually her acceptance of that. I'm very keen to work with her again."

At this point, his enthusiasm is palpable, and with *The Lobster* having won the Jury Prize at Cannes before it starts on its global roll-out, Lanthimos exudes a quiet confidence, satisfied that his new film, in its broader palette, use of voiceover and effective deployment of the string quartet repertoire to underscore the material, sees him deepening his craft. However, while it might look like the only way is up, he takes a typically reflective view on his trajectory from the home-brew Greek projects that made his name to an apparent future as an essentially international filmmaker.

"The idea of even being a film director in Greece was like a crazy dream, since there's really no industry or structure to support that. It used to be that I'd turn out commercials to make enough money to put into our own films, or at least be able to afford enough time off work to make them. I couldn't have put together *The Lobster* in Greece, so it's been a real progression to come to the UK, shoot in Ireland and work with different people, a different structure. And now that these wonderful actors want to work with me, suddenly there's the possibility of financing projects on the back of that. Then again, with more money, there's a bigger machine to support and in the end it's all the same, you never have enough. Same difficulties, different levels."

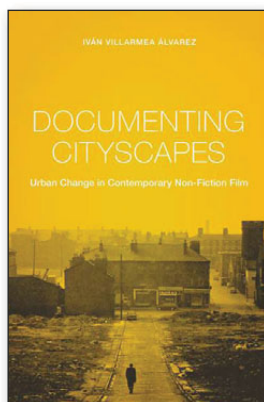
Not that he's actually moaning about it, *per se*...

"The way we made films in Greece, there were very strict limits to what you could afford, yet within that context you were completely free to make decisions, together with people who only cared about the film and didn't see it as a job. That was a precious thing, so the challenge for me is to take that and carry it with me when I make a film in another country, in a different situation. It wasn't exactly easy shooting this film in Ireland, but what you have to remember is that even though you're moving up a little in the level and scale of the filmmaking, restrictions are still a good thing. They stop you getting lost in too many choices." 

 **The Lobster is released in UK cinemas on 16 October and is reviewed on page 81**

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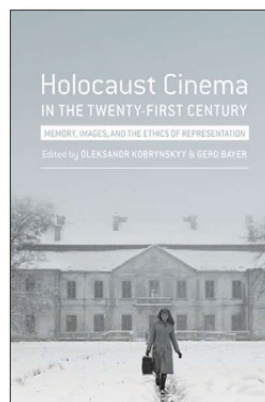
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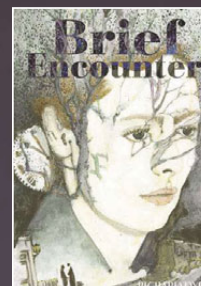
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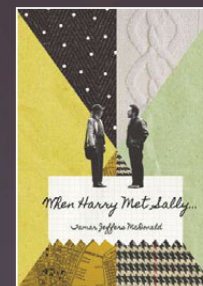
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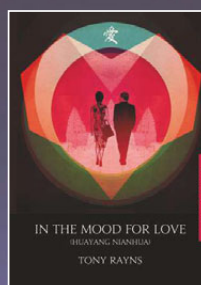
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# MILITANT TENDENCIES

In Sarah Gavron's *Suffragette* Carey Mulligan plays an ordinary Victorian woman awakened to the cause of women's rights. Here the actress talks about the dearth of quality female film roles, the joys of watching blockbusters on the big screen and why Hollywood is a bizarre construction

By Isabel Stevens

In a remarkable coup at the age of 19 Carey Mulligan bypassed drama school (she was rejected), fringe theatre and television, the normal career paths for aspiring actors, and landed the part of a giggly Bennett sister in Joe Wright's *Pride & Prejudice* (2005), as well as a role in *Forty Winks* at London's Royal Court. But it was her subsequent appearances on television which marked her as an actor of depth, most memorably in a chilling 2007 *Doctor Who* episode, 'Blink', which showed her ability to bring subtlety, melancholy and a quiet intensity to what might just have been another of Steven Moffat's Doctor-fixated ingénues. As a teenager she'd made an ally out of Julian Fellowes, though ignoring his first advice to her when learning of her acting dream: "Marry a lawyer." Now it was clear that as well as luck, she had real talent.

Her turn as another wide-eyed pretty young thing, this time as a 1960s schoolgirl in Lone Scherfig's coming-of-age drama *An Education* (2009), rightly drew Hollywood's attention. But ever since playing Gordon Gekko's estranged daughter in *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* (2010) – "It didn't feel like there was any depth to the character," she told the *Guardian* later – she has been increasingly wary about the roles she accepts, pointedly picking parts that would give critics pause before calling her 'fresh-faced' and put an end to the deluge of period drama scripts she was receiving (the self-harming singer in Steve McQueen's *Shame* in 2011; the feisty, fast-talking berater of the hapless Llewyn Davis in the Coens' 2013 film).

Sarah Gavron's *Suffragette* is not just another period drama – staggeringly, nearly 100 years after women won the right to vote in the UK, it's the first theatrical feature film about the early 20th-century women's movement and the fight for electoral equality. It centres on the political awakening of Mulligan's Maud, a fictional working-class mother in London's East End, who in 1912 has everything to lose by getting involved with a militant offshoot of the movement. It is a film on a mission to illuminate a forgotten history, but one which also takes care to show the everyday reality facing women, who often worked in brutal conditions. Gavron's tale is packed with a stellar cast (including Meryl Streep, Brendan Gleeson and Helena Bonham Carter) but is grounded by a tender, understated performance by Mulligan, who helped evolve her character from a rare working-class testimony, Hannah Mitchell's autobiography *The Hard Way Up*.

**Isabel Stevens:** How did you get involved with the film?

**Carey Mulligan:** My agent called and said there was a film about suffragettes. I thought, "Oh God, it's going to be some twee costume drama about women marching the streets with banners – how boring." It obviously wasn't.

I'd never met Sarah [Gavron]. I'd seen *Brick Lane* so I knew her work a bit, but the minute I met her, I trusted her. She's really smart and they had been trying to make this film for five or six years, so it was something they were really passionate about. I'd worked with the writer Abi Morgan before on *Shame*, so we had a bit of a relationship, which was really nice.

**IS:** Did you learn about the suffragettes at school?

**CM:** No. I had just a basic understanding of women marching, and that was sort of all. So reading the script was a real eye-opener. I was like, "God, did that really happen?" and then googling it and finding out about Black Friday [when up to 200 suffragettes were assaulted by police during a protest in 1910] and the hunger striking and the police brutality, the force-feeding and all of that stuff. I thought it was so astonishing it had taken 100 years for anyone to tell the story properly.

**IS:** There haven't really been many films on the subject, if you exclude *Mary Poppins*...

**CM:** Exactly – you have that image from *Mary Poppins*.

**BREAKING THE MOULD**

*Suffragette* sees Carey Mulligan's laundry worker Maud Watts rethink her conventional roles as wife and mother to Sonny (Ben Whishaw) and George (Adam Michael Dodd, below) when she becomes increasingly vociferous in the battle for women's voting rights (right)







You're like, "Oh, a suffragette movie – lovely." And then you're like, "Wait a second. It was a bit tougher than that." Even the least dangerous, least harmful things they did were like walking into an art gallery and slashing a famous painting. I can't imagine walking into the V&A with a knife and just slashing a famous painting. It would be the most terrifying thing and these women just did that, and that was the least of the things they did. And they put their lives in jeopardy every day and that went all the way to blowing up churches and houses.

**IS:** What research did you have to do for the role?

**CM:** Lots of it is about understanding the environment the character is brought up in. She starts off not being politically minded at all; she's a very average working-class woman in Victorian Britain. And the laundry work was brutal and very difficult physically. Lots of women died very young from working in laundries, so I had to try to understand what her life was like. But also she's brought up in a society where to defy convention is a very odd thing. She lives in a household where she's married, she has a husband and a son, and her role is wife and mother. Her role is not to be a political animal. It was getting into that mindset of apathy and accepting the social convention and not being interested at all in breaking the mould. So a lot of the stuff that I did with Sarah was just reading around everything before we started.

**IS:** Did you look at any photographs or documentary films from the time?

**CM:** No, not documentaries, but we had a lot of pictures of laundries and Bethnal Green in East London, and lots and lots of prison photos because they were being kept under surveillance.

**IS:** The clothes you wear in the film aren't at all like the flashy, beautiful outfits you normally see in period dramas.

**CM:** Anne-Marie [Duff] and I were in really shitty stuff. Most of ours were originals: they were really tatty, falling apart, horrible clothes. I had just done [Thomas Vinterberg's] *Far from the Madding Crowd*, where everything was new and made. *Suffragette* was just the opposite. That was an ill-fitting corset and very, very basic. We started actually shooting in the laundry so that was a really good way in 'cause we were in our work gear. We all had uncomfortable shoes, and all of that stuff really helps in forming a character.

**IS:** What discussions did you have with Sarah Gavron before the shoot?

**CM:** None of us wanted it to be like a period drama and we always wanted it to feel very authentic and very real, like you were in the room with these people. A lot of it was just about how we were going to approach the relationships in the film. We never wanted it to be that the men were villains and the women were the heroes. So it had to feel a fair portrayal of what was happening, so Ben Whishaw's character [Maud's husband Sonny] wasn't going to become a black-and-white villain. A lot of that stuff was in rehearsal, a lot of it was ongoing. There were millions of versions of Meryl Streep's Emily Pankhurst speech because we kept on finding really cool things Pankhurst had said where we thought, "That should be in the film." So a lot of it was conversation beforehand, but also as we went through we were constantly building things into the film.

**IS:** That sounds quite collaborative.

**CM:** It was and that was from everyone. Abi was amazing in incorporating everybody's ideas. But

*None of us wanted it to be like a period drama and we always wanted it to feel very authentic and very real, like you were in the room with these people*





## FIGHTING TALK

Meryl Streep plays the *grande dame* of the women's suffrage movement, Emmeline Pankhurst (below), who is an inspiration to Anne-Marie Duff's Violet and Mulligan's Maud (bottom)

everyone was given the freedom to have input. And there are also things you can't account for, like our relationship with Adam [Michael Dodd], who plays my son George. You can't really over-rehearse a kid; you give them the script and for them to feel natural and give a natural performance you just have to go with it. So it was collaborative, but also each scene was never pinned down to a certain place.

**IS: What was the most difficult scene for you to film?**

**CM:** The one where Emily Davison dies under the king's horse, because it was imagined. There was nothing real to react to. [Natalie Press as Davison] wasn't really being hit by anything. All of us lined up to watch the moment of impact were looking at nothing, just a tennis ball on a stick and we had to imagine it was her being hit by a horse. Everything else, the force-feeding and laundry, had felt so real and brutal and then all of a sudden we were having to use our imaginations for the climax of the film. Also we shot it over three days and were all moving around. When you don't have an easy linear scene to do it's difficult.

**IS: How does your theatre work inform your work in the cinema?**

**CM:** When you're doing a film, you think, "It'd be great to do a play" and then the minute you're doing a play, you think, "This is awful, I wish I was doing a film again," and the schedules kind of get to you in different ways. However, the more films I do, the more they feel like theatre.



*Suffragette* was really free; it was like working on *Shame*, to a degree. *Shame* felt very theatrical because we were able to move wherever we wanted to and the camera would follow us. We improvised a lot and we did what we wanted, we would do long, long takes where there wouldn't be cutting. Film feels arduous when you're constantly cutting, constantly resetting and you're doing 15 takes. The great thing about theatre is that you can go on for two hours and no one says, "Cut" – you just keep going. And when you can find that in a film environment, that's great.

**IS: How do you select your projects? A lot of the films you've worked on have had interesting female characters and been made by really good directors.**

**CM:** They don't come up very often. So before *Madding Crowd* I didn't work for a year and a half. I think I'd stopped for another year a couple of years ago because of the same thing.

**IS: Were you deliberately rejecting scripts because they didn't suit you?**

**CM:** Yeah, it's a funny thing where you play something successfully and you're like, "Great, let's do that again" and then you get offered a lot of the same parts. So it's sort of a waiting game. There's that path which I've taken being like, "Right I'm going to wait until the right role comes along." Or you can start generating your own work producing things.

**IS: Is that something you'd like to do?**

**CM:** Yeah. Up until now I've felt like I've acted for hire and am not that interested in the stuff. But there's just a need now; I don't think I can sit around for another couple of years and wait for the right part. There is a book I want to adapt but I don't want to say anything because I don't want someone else to do it! I'd also like to work with Sarah again and we've spoken about it – we're looking for the right film or right story to adapt.

**IS: Are there any female directors you'd like to work with?**

**CM:** Lynne Ramsay. She's at the top of my list, I'm trying to hunt her down! Andrea Arnold. Those two would be top and those are the kind of films I'm most interested in.

**IS: Do you go to the cinema often?**

**CM:** Yeah, I go and see crap though – not crap, but I don't go and see really serious films. I kind of watch screenings of serious films and weirdly need to gear myself up for them, it's terrible. But I think with such an influx over awards season and all this pressure like, "This is amazing," I find myself shying away from them and though I'll watch the great films eventually, I generally go to the cinema for complete escapism.

The last film I saw was *Jurassic World*... Twice... It's just so great. If I'm watching a great serious film in a cinema with people talking around me it drives me insane. That's why I have to watch them at home on my own. But those kind of blockbuster films, I'm all for shouting at the screen and that stuff.

**IS: Talking of blockbusters, what was Hollywood like?**

**CM:** I think the idea of Hollywood is a bizarre construction. It's not really real. The media fill us with all this bollocks about how people in the public eye live their lives, like the *Daily Mail* saying I get paid \$6 million a movie – complete nonsense. But it's all part of the business, trying to make it into this glamorous world. ☺



**Suffragette is released in UK cinemas on 12 October and is reviewed on page 91**



# FIRST AMONG EQUALS

An anthology of films documenting the rise of the women's suffrage movement in the UK offers a fascinating portrait of shifting gender roles in the early years of the 20th century.

By Pamela Hutchinson

"You have to make more noise than anybody else, you have to make yourself more obtrusive than anybody else, you have to fill all the papers more than anybody else; in fact, you have to be there all the time and see that they do not know you under." Emmeline Pankhurst spoke those words in 1913, ten years after she had founded the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), a militant organisation that would advocate for female suffrage with "deeds, not words". It was five years after her first arrest and imprisonment, following her attempt to enter the Palace of Westminster and deliver a message to the prime minister. There were still five more years to go before the 1918 Representation of the People Act would grant the vote to some women, and then another ten before complete electoral equality was established. The act which enabled that was passed by Parliament in July 1928, just a month after Pankhurst's death.

The suffragettes were not content simply to appear in the newspapers. They took advantage of a growing medium and positioned themselves front and centre in cinema newsreels also. Pankhurst's instruction to "make more noise" provides the title of a new compilation of suffragette films from the BFI, proof that the campaign she partly led still fires the public imagination, and that her arguments bear repeating. The films in this anthology document the campaign for female suffrage from 1899-1917, from the birth of the movement, and earliest days of the cinema, to the brink of its first success. There are scenes of marches, protests and by-elections. There is the notorious, and chilling, footage of the Epsom Derby in 1913 when Emily Davison fell under the hooves of the king's horse as she attempted to draw attention to the campaign for equal suffrage. Movingly, there is also footage of her funeral, attended by a substantial number of fellow activists and locals.

The suffragette movement was always volatile, and there is plenty of violence in these reels. A protest in 1913 in Trafalgar Square becomes a riot and Pankhurst's daughter Sylvia is arrested. There are skirmishes outside Parliament



Kicking against the pricks: *Milling the Militants: A Comical Absurdity* (1913)


and Buckingham Palace, where the police arrested 50 suffragettes, including Emmeline Pankhurst, one day in 1914.

But there is more to this 80-minute compilation than the campaign for voting rights. Other films here tell the story of women's changing role in British society across the first two decades of the 20th century. In the crude slapstick of 1899's *Women's Rights*, two men in drag play matrons gossiping by a fence who become outraged when they discover that two scamps have nailed their hems to the boards, pinning them to the spot. In the rickety anti-feminist logic of this skit, women are fundamentally unequal to men – rendered immobile by the simplest ploy due to their feminine garments and then ridiculous in their impotent rage.

A decade later, Alma Taylor and Chrissie White run riot in a pair of 1911 'Tilly Girl' films, as mischievous sisters who flirt with chaps and defy authority in a refreshingly modern manner. As the years pass, the sex war ramps up, with husbands and wives battling over the roles in the home. In *Milling the Militants: A Comical Absurdity* (1913), Mr Brown is so oppressed by his

activist wife that he dreams up a vicious revenge fantasy in which suffragettes are punished with hard labour and ducking stools for their crimes against patriarchy. White appears again in *Wife the Weaker Vessel* (1915), as a young woman confounding her husband's desire for a biddable missus: a "lamb" rather than a "vixen".

The WSPU declared a campaign ceasefire at the outset of fighting in 1914, to contribute to the war effort instead. A snippet of footage in *Make More Noise!* shows women marching through London under the banner, 'Mobilize brains and energy of women', which is followed by two of the most powerful sequences here. In *A Day in the Life of a Munition Worker* (1917) and a newsreel from the same year, titled *Scottish Women's Hospital*, women are shown doing demanding, vital work: carefully constructing bombs, or calmly removing shrapnel from a soldier's leg. The sight of active women in overalls is a far cry from the full-skirted gossips of the earliest film here.

The revolution in dress and work recalls another phrase from Pankhurst's 1913 speech. "Women are very slow to rouse," she said, "but once they are aroused, once they are determined, nothing on earth and nothing in heaven will make women give way; it is impossible." A Topical Budget newsreel from 1917, which shows the leaders of the movement meeting to christen a women's parliamentary party, has the now-amusing title *Will There Be Women MPs?* And by the time Taylor and White, as the irrepressible Tilly and Sally, give their final salute to the camera with tin medals pinned to their frocks, victory seems inevitable. 

**Make More Noise! Suffragettes in Silent Film** is released in UK cinemas on 23 October and is reviewed on page 83



*Wife the Weaker Vessel* (1915)



# THE WAY WE WERE

*The revival of a number of long unavailable television documentaries from the 1950s and 60s reveals how daring, personal and experimental nonfiction television of the time could be – as well as offering a poignant glimpse of Britain during a time of great change*

**By John Wyver**

Fifty years ago, the distinguished documentary producer Norman Swallow speculated: “It may well be that the television of our own time will not be remembered for its new dramatists, its rediscovery of satire, or its presentation of controversy.” Swallow was writing his book *Factual Television* in the mid-1960s, as he and we were watching *Doctor Who*, *Z Cars*, the first plays of Dennis Potter and *That Was the Week That Was*. Yet for this admittedly partisan observer, the small screen’s most memorable offerings were not these acknowledged classics but rather “the programmes of a small group of men who have used the television documentary as a means of expressing their own vision of our age”.

Among the hallowed names Swallow identified, all male and all white, were Denis Mitchell, Ken Russell, John Schlesinger, Philip Donnellan, Richard Marquand, Peter Morley, John Boorman and Peter Watkins. With a strong suggestion that he too should be included among their number, Swallow hailed as artists these authors of “the personal documentary”. By which he meant “a programme, usually made on film, which is very much the individual work of its producer and/or director and which, through its imaginative handling of reality, expresses his own attitude not only to the programme’s immediate subject matter but to the whole of the world in which he lives”. In such television documentaries of the 1950s and early 1960s, he suggested, British television “has enjoyed its finest creative moments”.

Few are the readers of *Sight & Sound*, I suspect, who would agree. Of the work of the best and the brightest highlighted by Swallow, only Peter Watkins’s *Culloden* (1964) and *The War Game* (1965) made the cut in the magazine’s 2014 poll of the 50 Greatest Documentaries of All Time. Watkins, Russell, Schlesinger, Boorman and even Marquand (*Return of the Jedi*, 1983) are all celebrated, and occasionally castigated, for their later feature films, but with only a few exceptions, such as Russell’s artist profiles, their TV work from the 1960s remains unknown. Though they were seen by a diverse audi-

ence of millions at the time, the subsequent neglect of this period of nonfiction television has meant that few of the films in question (Russell once again excepted, and Watkins) have been accessible for screenings, for critical debate and for creative dialogues with later filmmakers. With the forthcoming BFI Southbank season ‘Visions of Change’ in London, and the release of two BFI DVD box-sets, many key films from the 50s and 60s will once again be available and we will be far more able to judge the validity of Swallow’s claims.

One of the key films included is Denis Mitchell and Roy Harris’s *Morning in the Streets* (1959). This artful slice of ‘social impressionism’ assembles the sights and sounds of the terraces in an unnamed northern English city. The anonymous voices of those who live, work and play there feature on the soundtrack along with an insistent score. The method is associative and allusive, although there are aspects which, more than 50 years on, come across as heavy-handed, such as the juxtaposition of slum dwellings with street names such as ‘Love Lane’ and ‘Paradise’. There are strong echoes of earlier British documentary traditions, both in the activist mode of Arthur Elton and E.H. Anstey’s *Housing Problems* (1935), with the accusatory testimony of a female resident delivered to camera, and in the poetic portrait form of Humphrey Jennings’s *Spare Time* (1939). But at the same time *Morning in the Streets* feels very much of its cultural moment, close to the contemporary street photography of Nigel Henderson and Roger Mayne, engaged by the Free Cinema films of Lindsay Anderson and Karel Reisz, and clearly influenced by the radio features of Louis MacNeice and the ‘ballads’ of Charles Parker.

Parker worked in radio during the 1950s at BBC Midland, where he developed an innovative form of creative sound montage. He married this approach with a deep conviction of the importance of documenting the experiences of working people and social minorities rarely able to achieve access to the airwaves. The director Philip Donnellan began his professional career

## DAYS IN THE LIFE

(From top, by row) Ken Russell’s *Pop Goes the Easel* (1962), Philip Donnellan’s *The Colony* (1964), Denis Mitchell and Roy Harris’s *Morning in the Streets* (1959), Donnellan’s *The Fortress* (1965) and Charlie Squires’s *Walk Down Any Street* (1965)

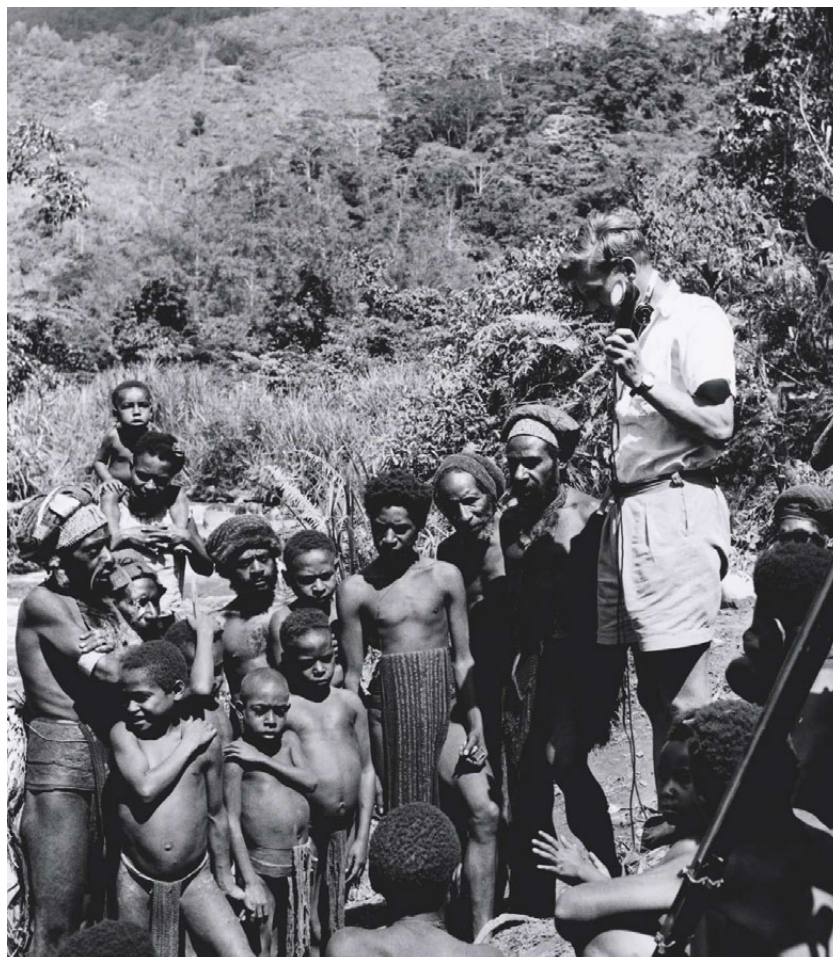






working with Parker, then translated his concerns to film in documentaries such as *Joe the Chainsmith* (BBC, 1958), about Black Country working-class life, and *The Colony* (BBC, 1964), about the experiences of those living in the Afro-Caribbean community in Birmingham. Like Mitchell, Donnellan was a privileged member of a programme-making generation who, after the arrival of ITV in late 1955, benefited from a comparatively stable broadcast duopoly. This created a production context with guaranteed funding and regulatory requirements for programming committed to ideas of public service. Documentary filmmakers at this moment also brought to the medium an awareness that there were many areas of a rapidly changing society which had not been previously exposed on film. The lives of working families were vividly documented in films like Donnellan's *The Fortress* (BBC, 1965), which he shot on a Sheffield estate; in *A Wedding on Saturday* (Granada, 1964), produced on two-inch videotape by a team that included Swallow and Mitchell; and in *Six Days to Saturday* (BBC West, 1963), John Boorman's imaginative film essay about a football team and its followers. The worlds of the newly recognised teenager were observed, often with bewilderment, as in *Fan Fever* (Associated-Rediffusion, 1956), but sometimes with the understanding that filmmaker Mike Grigsby demonstrates in *Deckie Learner* (Granada, 1965) about a young man on a deep-sea trawler based in Grimsby. And British racism was revealed in films such as *The Negro Next Door* (Associated-Rediffusion, 1965), reported by Desmond Wilcox, and *Black Marries White – The Last Barrier* (Associated-Rediffusion, 1964). The latter was directed by Peter Morley, whose understanding of intolerance had been shaped in 1933 at the age of nine by his flight, along with his Jewish parents, from the Nazis.

In addition to a permissive production environment, what made this work possible was the introduction of programme-making technologies, notably lightweight 16mm cameras and mobile synchronous sound recording, which were cheaper and less cumbersome than previous 35mm systems. Filmmakers could now enter more easily into the myriad worlds of an increasingly affluent Britain wrestling with conflicted understandings of class, of sexuality, and of national identity and the end of empire. The Arriflex camera and Nagra tape recorder in combination were also sufficiently flexible to be used as what the French theorist Alexandre Astruc had in 1948 called the *caméra-stylo*, or 'camera pen'. Freed from the constraints of the studio technology, film, Astruc imagined, could become as personal as writing. A decade and more on, the documentarists of British television were indeed using their visual and aural pens to take notes, scribble ideas, compose essays, conjure up poems

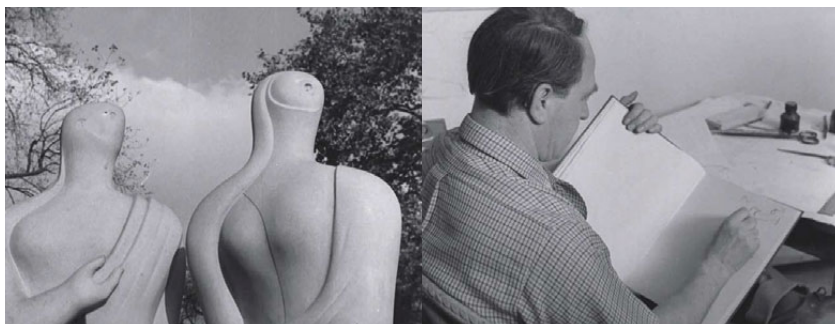


**WORLD IN ACTION**  
David Attenborough in Papua New Guinea in an episode of *Zoo Quest* (1957, above), Peter Morley's *Black Marries White – The Last Barrier* (1964, above right), and John Read's *Henry Moore* (1951, below), which offers a pastoral-Romantic vision of the English sculptor

and craft polemics. And then they saw their 'writing' in images and sounds broadcast to and debated by a nation hungry for authentic experience in among the entertainment of *Double Your Money* (Associated-Rediffusion, 1955-68) and *The Black and White Minstrel Show* (BBC, 1958-78).

One of the most exciting discoveries of 'Visions of Change' is Charlie Squires's *Walk Down Any Street* (Associated-Rediffusion, 1965). This is a clear-eyed, close-up portrait, shot on 16mm in *cinéma vérité* style, of a working-class family in Bermondsey. Across its 50 minutes, it features just four extended sequences of death and life—a funeral, a 21st birthday party, a hospital birth and a christening. Each is dispassionately observed at considerable length, with minimal music from beyond the world of the film and no voiceover after an opening introduction. The film's apparent objectivity is informed by a deep sympathy and an authorial understanding, ensuring that this compelling film is a composition by Squires and his team collectively wielding a 'camera pen' in a manner that is both personal and political.

Such committed social documentaries were one strand of a medium that by the late 1950s was pioneering new forms of visual journalism (in *This Week*, Associated Rediffusion/Thames, 1956-78; and *World in Action*, Granada, 1963-98), as well as factual television concerned with science (in series such as *Eye on Research*, BBC, 1957-62), natural history (David Attenborough's *Zoo Quest*, BBC, 1954-63), history (Sir Mortimer Wheeler's *Armchair Voyage: Hellenic Cruise*, BBC, 1958—one of the first presenter-led film series to be shot on location) and,





perhaps especially, the arts. John Read had been making accomplished profiles of visual artists since *Henry Moore* in 1951, which he was able to argue had to be shot on location and on film largely because Moore's sculptures were too bulky to transport to a studio. But it was in the arts magazine *Monitor* (BBC, 1958-65) that the fecund culture of the time was first matched with truly imaginative filmmaking. *Henry Moore* is a pastoral-Romantic vision of the sculptor, who is shown as grounded in England's rural landscape and committed to supposedly timeless values. In contrast, Ken Russell's *Pop Goes the Easel* (BBC, 1962) is a freewheeling, sexy group portrait of four young artists committed to life in the city and in the moment. Russell collages archive of Brigitte Bardot and Shirley Temple with scenes of circus life and wrestling, fantasy sequences and an extended celebration of the twist in a form of pop art for the screen. The British documentary has few sequences as exhilarating as the opening in a fun-fair, filmed in glowing monochrome by Ken Higgins and immaculately edited by Allan Tyrer to James Darren's hit single 'Goodbye Cruel World'.

As Swallow's comments above suggest, a strategy at the time for sustaining interest in and securing support for documentaries was to stress the idea of individual authorship and personal vision. And as the publicity materials for the BFI Southbank season indicate, such valorising of the lone maker continues to prove useful. But it is crucial also to recognise that factual television in this era was made possible by a pool of exceptionally skilled cinematographers including Higgins and Walter Lassally, sound recordists, and editors like Tyrer. Nor as the archives begin to open up should we concentrate primarily on established names. Absent, for example, from 'Visions of Change' are the (admittedly few) women who were working as filmmakers at this time, such as Caryl Doncaster, one of the first producers on *This Week*; Pamela Wilcox Bower, director of films including *Now We Are Married* (BBC, 1958); and Nancy Thomas, a stalwart producer on *Monitor* whose contributions have been consistently overshadowed by those of Schlesinger, Russell and the other boys.

Authorship is unquestionably valuable as a lens to approach documentaries from the moment on which 'Visions of Change' focuses. Many of the films that are included do indeed demonstrate Swallow's vaunted personal vision. But, as with all indexical documents from the past, much of their fascination and their power comes also from the essentially accidental, or at least unavoidable, traces of the texture of what life was like half a century ago in a northern town, on a deep-sea trawler, at a hip London party or in an inner-city hospital ward. Nothing of this record is unmediated; nonetheless the films offer us a form of direct access to the clothes, hairstyles, furniture, fashions, speech patterns, body language, street views and countless other aspects of worlds that are gone. These are ghosts of a past that frequently feels, as the opening of L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* has it, like "a foreign country". They did things differently then, but the wonder of the documentary is that we can glimpse them doing so, even as we know that most of those depicted are as lost to us as those moments.

Ultimately, while I respect the arguments of Swallow and others for the personal visions expressed by a number of those working for British television in the



*Much of the fascination in these films comes from the texture of what life was like half a century ago in a northern town, on a deep-sea trawler, at a London party or in a hospital ward*

1950s and 60s, it is a shot like the one of a family bedroom at the centre of *Morning in the Streets* that I value the most. The camera shows us a child asleep in a bed, then pans past a television set to another bed with two more kids, and then reveals a father cradling a further sibling, before moving round to discover one more child in yet another bed in the room. The poignancy of this scene, the relationships that it suggests and the politics that it exposes, is unmatched in any drama of the post-war years. Which is just one sliver of why one of the BFI's most valuable services to screen culture over the past decade has been its consistently revelatory revaluing of the British documentary. The DVD sets and publications devoted to the GPO Film Unit, the uncovering of films from the mining, steel and shipbuilding industries, and the *Land of Promise* (wartime and post-war documentaries) and *Shadows of Progress* (factual films from the 1950s to 1970s) initiatives have transformed our understanding of films of fact and their relationships with society and the arts across the past century. And time and again the films have shown us personal visions but also scenes like that of the father and his family in a single room. 'Visions of Change' is a more than worthy successor to those earlier projects, and all the more welcome as the first to focus on television, the most significant mass medium of the 20th century. **S**

**i** 'Visions of Change: The evolution of the British TV Documentary' runs at BFI Southbank, London, from 19 October–26 November. The two DVD box-sets will be available later in the year. David Attenborough discusses his work at BFI Southbank on 4 November










# LINE IN THE SAND

*Denis Villeneuve's violent drug cartel drama 'Sicario' is the latest in a long line of films to exploit the mythic potential of the lawless US-Mexico borderlands – an ethnocentric tradition which plants its feet firmly on American soil and looks south in despair*

**By Michael Atkinson**

Inevitably, the US-Mexico borderlands have become a 'zone', one of those cultural arenas where vectors of violence, greed, innocence and power meet, in a perfectly resonant landscape, and attain a dizzying existential torque. The 1,900-mile border, surrounded by thousands of square miles of desert (some densely inhabited, some uninhabitable), is no longer just a geopolitical fact, but a text of modern crisis.

Drenched in anxiety and secrecy, Denis Villeneuve's *Sicario* may be the region's *12 Years a Slave*, the movie that articulates to the world what's at stake in southern North America, and how it articulates deeper cataclysms for all of us. Its title means 'hitman' in Mexican slang, but though the film does show such killers, and the grim evidence their work leaves behind – swinging from bridges or left to decompose behind walls – its focus is really on those agencies north of the border tasked with holding the sicarios' paymasters to account. Emily Blunt plays an FBI agent enlisted by a task force led by Josh Brolin to assist in bringing cartel kingpin Manuel Diaz to justice – even if it means the mission trampling over the fine line of legality while "shaking the tree" in the middle of the drug trade's turf war in order to out him. As Benicio del Toro's special adviser tells Blunt, finding Diaz would be like discovering a "vaccine" to prevent further murders – ends justifying means as all sides slide toward a violent abyss.

Borders have always been where the shit goes down. Many borders ache with cultural meaning, but for Americans, the southern border and the badlands on either side of it have always vibrated with a particularly mythic, even Old Testament tension – the sense that here lies the nethermost edge of civilisation, such as it is, and beyond there be tygers, or at least *bandidos*, 

**DOWN MEXICO WAY**  
In Denis Villeneuve's *Sicario* Emily Blunt plays an FBI agent enlisted by a task force led by Josh Brolin to assist in bringing a drug cartel kingpin to justice



◀ crumbling social structures, shallow graves, primitive religiosity and endless wasteland. Mexico was also where Americans looking to escape America, or merely the law, would drain out, for centuries, enabling outlaw sociopathy to ferment in the wilderness like corn liquor, creating a wild frontier region equal parts doom and opportunity, as much a product of America, and its need for a primal 'there' to backlight the ideological 'here', as it was of old colonialism, poverty and lunar terrain.

It's a myth, of course, as millions of happy American tourists could tell you, but it's also somewhat true, and it's been rampagingly true since 2006, when for a matrix of circumstantial reasons – predominantly, new Mexican *presidente* Felipe Calderón deciding to send troops against the drug cartel battalions – the carnage and lawlessness ramped up exponentially, and the rough beast of the plains began to hold sway. Here's how CNN.com evoked the scene: "Thirty-five bodies left on the freeway during rush-hour in a major tourist city. A person's face sewn onto a soccer ball. Bodies found stuffed in barrels of acid. Heads sent rolling onto busy nightclub dance floors."

An academic theory-discipline – border studies – has even emerged from the fraught North American horse latitudes, more concerned with immigrant rights and identity than whatever mysterious, nefarious quality we sense on *la línea* from the north. Of course, even to consider the nine-year-old Mexican Drug War as a 'border' issue, with its body count now ranging around 160,000 Mexicans, is very ethnocentric, even neo-colonial – as are the movies that take it on, *Sicario* included, almost always standing on American sand and looking south. (Historically, border studies can be boiled down, as the film scholar Shohini Chaudhuri says, to the fact that in relation to the border, "the people of the borderlands don't cross it; rather, it crosses them".)

The modern paradigm for this was struck by Steven Soderbergh's Oscar-winning *Traffic* (2000), the moral dynamics of which had almost everything to do with Americans – how they fuel and are impacted by the Mexican drug industry. The tapestry-like nature of the film runs from Ohio to Washington DC to La Jolla, but its toxic, iodine-yellow Tijuana sequences, with Benicio del Toro as a Fordian lawman stoically battling an entirely

*If you ever wondered what the gun-loving, money-is-everything rodomontades of American hip-hop would look like if they came to life, you need not look any further than Juárez*

**BLAST FROM THE PAST**  
The Tijuana sequences in *Traffic* (2000, below) offered an incendiary vision of hell on earth, but in light of the unspeakable horrors of Mexico's subsequent drug war, Steven Soderbergh's film now feels almost quaint



lawless world, limned a potent portrait of hell on earth, so close, as it were, but far enough away to allow us to sleep at night. The film's real target is luxurious American complacency (those spoiled white one-percenters in their mansions), while the root of the problem south of the Rio Grande is corruption in the Mexican government, top to bottom. This was 2000, years before the heat was turned up and the headless and burned bodies of cartel rivals and witnesses began showing up in Arizona and Texas as well as all over northern Mexico. In terms of violence, Soderbergh's film is tough-skinned and serious, but subsequent history has rendered it almost quaint.

However narcissistic we've been, the nature of the border's personality has been to implicate Americans in its mayhem, and guilt has radiated from it in waves. Tommy Lee Jones and Guillermo Arriaga's *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada* (2005) homed in on the shamefaced force of border policing, as Barry Pepper's bigoted new patrolman accidentally kills the eponymous Mexican and then secretly digs him a hole in the desert – the next two burials are overseen by Jones's embittered cowboy, kidnapping the young cop and forcing him, along with the blueing, antifreeze-saturated corpse, into the southern no man's land, in order to set things right. Likewise, white guilt, in the combating forms of rangy opportunist and creepy psychopath, structures the Coens' *No Country for Old Men* (2007), a film in which the borderlands serve more as a *noir* chessboard than a sociopolitical minefield. A handful of Mexicans, most of them dead, hardly impede on the American infighting. (You'd have to ask Cormac McCarthy why the bloodthirsty, bolt-pistol-wielding hitman wasn't Mexican.)

More self-aware was Gareth Edwards's remarkable *Monsters* (2010), which dared to explore the vagaries of border stress via a fictional alien invasion, culminating in one of the most haunting border crossings in the history of movies. Still, for many viewers, it was *Breaking Bad* (2008-13) that crystallised the border as a place where Americans lose themselves, even if, as the show rolled on and Walter White progressed from nebbish to juggernaut, the real cartel butchery in the newspaper headlines evolved into something you couldn't put on television.

*Sicario*, however much its border-policing nightmare pulses with anxiety and piles up with corpses, also savours complementary flavours of American shame and fear, and it's worth noting how different the Mexican perspective can be. A natural border dweller, filmmaker Amat Escalante (born in Spain, grew up in Mexico, with an American mother) has staked out *la frontera* as a realm of existentialist dead-endism. His first feature, *Sangre* (2005), was a zombie-fied familial melodrama that could've taken place anywhere, but *Los bastardos* (2008) was site-specific, dilating the geographical 'borderiness' to encompass the day labourer outskirts and afflicted suburbs of south LA, and doing it with what would become his signature toggle between self-conscious minimalism and ball-busting shock. The cartels are unreferenced, but still the menace of colliding worlds hangs over the film, which dallies rather Tsai Ming-liang-ishly with two inarticulate illegals waiting for work, idling in public parks, and slowly coming around to invading a home and introducing 'alien' chaos into the threadbare American fabric.

His next film, *Heli* (2013), lands with both feet on the





frontier, sliding unpredictably from lyrical eloquence to confrontational brutality, and exploiting the iconic portentousness of the Mexican desert-world, physical and social, in ways no one has since Luis Buñuel. It's the first feature to plunge us into cartel-land without a map: torture, executions, bodies left as billboards for pain, but before long we jump backwards, into the lives of a poor Mexican family whose precocious yet clueless 12-year-old daughter is secretly dating a fool of a teenage police cadet, whose attempts to impress her with his cartel knowledge tips the first stone on an avalanche of misery. No other feature made in either country has yet to bring us into the jaws of cartel malevolence as *Heli* does, as much as even the most appalling scenes of violence can be spiked with the grim comedy of a culture so inured to haphazard bloodletting that rolling TV reports of severed heads hardly warrant a comment.

Of course, the new documentary wave – a startling general upsurge in audience appetite as well as low-budget filmmaking interest – may be the best mode through which to suss out the border fallout, and the tsunami is just beginning to break. It is, after all, where news footage suddenly and routinely became Dantean. Bernardo Ruiz's *Reportero* (2012), Shaul Schwarz's *Narco cultura* (2013) and Matthew Heineman's recent *Cartel Land* are devastating primers of the wasteland.

Ruiz's film lays out the history of the weekly Tijuana magazine *Zeta*, which regularly exposed and excoriated cartel members, and saw its writers and staff face the daily threat of assassination, a consequence of the strange notion of reporters gambling their lives and families, in a field where nobody can protect them, on the need to tell the truth.

Schwarz's underseen *Narco cultura* casts a wider net,

looking at how Mexican life under the cartels has germinated 'narco culture', with its own kind of pop mythology, its own mural art, and even a new music genre: *narcocorrido*, accordion-based mariachi-style folk mated with gangsta rap, and outfitted with lyrics extolling the cartel gangster's perspectives about money, murder and bling. The budding artist Schwarz follows around is not just praising the cartels in song; he's their hired hagiographer, playing a demo tape for his employers and getting a wad of American Benjamins for his efforts. Talk about hearts and minds.

At *corrido* concerts the crowds enthusiastically sing along to tales of beheading and counting *dólares*, while on stage the singers raise fake bazookas in one hand and microphones in the other. If you ever wondered what the idiotic gun-loving, money-is-everything rodomontades of American hip-hop would look like if they came to life, you need not look any further than Juárez, where the music itself could be said to have a body count.

Heineman's eye-popping *Cartel Land* gets intimate with another by-product of the cartel wars – the inevitable creation of ascendant vigilante militias, bringing the fight to the cartels outside of the law and thereby shoving the entire social dynamic one step closer to anarchy. In the trenches with his amateur warrior-leaders – a Mexican doctor and an Arizona army vet – and their followers, Heineman hardly editorialises, though it's hard not to see the John Wayne-ism of the American badasses, and the fact that the ubiquity of guns in America is at least as damaging as narcotics. In any case, as if this were a Dostoevsky story, both militias become compromised and poisoned by their own lawless zeal.

Meanwhile, the cartel soldiers and cooks we meet suggest that the vigilantes and the cartels

**ANATOMY OF HELL**  
(Clockwise from top left)  
Tommy Lee Jones and  
Guillermo Arriaga's *The  
Three Burials of Melquiades  
Estrada* (2005), Amat  
Escalante's *Heli* (2013),  
Shaul Schwarz's *Narco  
cultura* (2013) and  
Matthew Heineman's  
*Cartel Land* (2015)








and the governments on either side are so incessantly connected that there are no heroes and villains, no us and them. The physical border is just a shadow, with no sociopolitical reality to anchor it.

We're in a moment of cresting apocalyptic bedlam, likely only to get worse as a result of rash political manoeuvres (like Calderón's), so it can be easy to forget how the border always possessed a metaphoric charge. Paul Muni, the early 30s Benicio del Toro, occupied the tense noir-ish melodrama of *Bordertown* (1935), in which the zone was merely a version of the Wild West updated, erected on the Warner backlot. *Noir*, a genre always on the lookout for totemic geographies that reverberated with doom and desire without a word needing be uttered, found the border richly seductive: Robert Montgomery's *Ride the Pink Horse* (1947) and Ida Lupino's *The Hitch-Hiker* (1953) may be the most memorable hooded visitations to the outlands, the former a meditative, prowling hunt for vengeance in a studio-contrived Mexico; the latter a bad road trip with a trigger-happy widow-maker, heading south till the car collapses and civilisation (and daylight) drops away entirely. In both cases, though, and in many others, the crisis at hand is Americans going where they shouldn't; the toxicity always flowed downward, run off into a sewer.

Of course, Orson Welles headlocked this idea in *Touch of Evil* (1958), the inkiest, most despairing, least safe Hollywood film ever, its characters lost on the frontier amid goldbrickers and assassins and slaving gangsters as if there were nowhere else to go. Its unforgettable landscape, patrolled by Welles's archangelic camera, was a thoroughly modern invention, unavailable in any significant way to many westerns. After all, the border was largely invented by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

in 1848, making Mexico as a distinct idea more or less irrelevant for any western set earlier in that century. It was just all wilderness. On the other hand, for westerns that eyeballed the 1900s, and modernity, the border was set and the southern realms became a differentiated oasis, killing ground and *terra incognita*.

This began to mean something with the arrival of Sam Peckinpah, whose anti-westerns raised hell and died pitifully out-of-synch deaths on *la frontera*, from *Major Dundee* (1965) to the black border song of *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974), complete with its own severed head, and a bottom-feeder thrust that resonates with an eternal Kafkaesque absurdity. They're films of essential borderality; set anywhere else, they would've suffered half the thematic payload. From there, through the Reagan and Bush eras, the area saw only sporadic engagement: the disappointing but earnest Tony Richardson drama *The Border* (1982), Alex Cox's fiery if predictably unfocused *Highway Patrolman* (1991), and, perhaps more to the point, Paul Dujan's tiny indie *Flesh Suitcase* (1995), about a pair of heroin mules in a border motel sweatily waiting out the invisible processes of their own digestive tracts.

If the border and what happens there is as much metaphor as cultural crucible – like deserts and jungles – then it comes close to being a universal condition, particularly for denizens of countries marked by division. Borders are what happens when society inflicts itself on the planet; we create them to separate, and then to cross, and in the process create ourselves, in all of our backbiting, ethnocentric glory. Imagine, if you can, a planet without them. What could be less human? 

 **Sicario is released in UK cinemas on 8 October and is reviewed on page 89**

*If the border and what happens there is as much metaphor as cultural crucible – like deserts and jungles – then it comes close to being a universal condition*

**FRONTIER JUSTICE**  
(Clockwise from top left)  
Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958), Sam Peckinpah's *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974), *Breaking Bad* (2008-13) and Robert Montgomery's *Ride the Pink Horse* (1947)

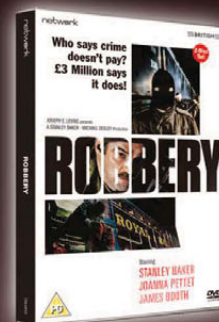
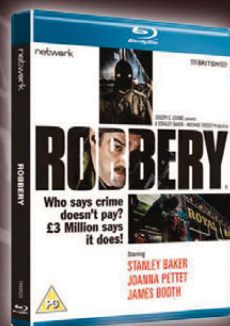


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# THE TARKOVSKY LEGACY

The slim body of work produced by the great Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky (1932-86) – seven transcendent, spiritual films marked by exquisite visual imagery, mesmerising long takes, a near-pantheistic reverence for landscape and nature, and a seamless blending of real time, dream and memory – helped redefine the possibilities of arthouse cinema. His enduring influence can be seen in the eclectic array of filmmakers of the past 30 years whose work, in different ways, owes him a debt, from Lars von Trier and Terrence Malick to Béla Tarr and Claire Denis. **By Nick James**



In the course of just seven feature films – *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), *Andrei Rublev* (1966), *Solaris* (1972), *Mirror* (1974), *Stalker* (1979), *Nostalgia* (1983) and *The Sacrifice* (1986) – Andrei Tarkovsky changed what cinema as an artform could achieve. Despite the lack of canonical consensus today as to which filmmakers should be counted as the true greats, one can make this claim about Tarkovsky because many active filmmakers today tell us as much.

But how did this one filmmaker's influence come to be so culturally pervasive? Critics tend to use the word 'Tarkovskian' with alacrity. Whenever an elegiac film incorporates long single-camera takes, is happy not to distinguish between real time, action, dream and memory, and wants to drink in the landscape, that word is in the wind. You could say that when it comes to a certain kind of festival-friendly international art movie, Tarkovsky owns the weather. If there are grasslands swirling, white mist veiling a house in a dark green valley, cleansing torrential rains, a burning barn or house, or tracking shots across objects submerged in water, a Tarkovsky name-drop is never far away. That usage might seem glib, but these things indicate a wider aesthetic terrain that deals in transcendence and the spiritual, but one that has resonance outside of religious belief – a cinema of what we might call the agnostic sublime.

So how did this come to be? The obvious place to start is with those who have influenced the influencer. Andrei Tarkovsky was born into a family in which an atmosphere of artistic inheritance was intense and unavoidable. His father, Arseny, was a serious poet of some reputation. Although Arseny did not publish much – as he knew his work would not get past the Soviet censors – the great modernist poet Anna Akhmatova thought highly of him. His first collection did not appear until 1962, by which time his son had already made his debut feature *Ivan's Childhood*.

That Arseny was the primary influence on Andrei is irrefutable, attested to by the fact that Andrei chose to quote seven of his poems in his films, across *Mirror*, *Stalker* and *Nostalgia*. It is even arguable that Tarkovsky's whole approach to cinema comes from striving to

find cinematic equivalents to the way written poetry makes use of nature, landscape and the elements. In *Sculpting in Time*, his 1986 book on cinema practice, Tarkovsky says, "Poetic links seem to me perfectly appropriate to the potential of cinema as the most truthful and poetic of art forms... The pattern of life is far more poetic than it is sometimes represented by the determined advocates of naturalism."

In terms of poetry, the key film is *Mirror*, Tarkovsky's imaginatively complex and imagistic autobiographical memoir, framed as the recollections of a dying poet, yet presented as quintessential dream logic. One of the birthing moments of my own cinephilia happened when I saw the film's famous first scene (which comes immediately after the prologue of the stuttering adolescent being hypnotised). The protagonist's young mother is sitting on a fence, smoking, when she sees a strange man approaching across the grasslands along a route her husband usually takes. He introduces himself as a doctor and sits beside her, but the fence snaps beneath them. After they get up, laughing, they chat for a little longer, before he takes his leave. As she's watching him depart, a sudden swirl of wind stirs the grasses, and he turns around as if to say, "Look at that."

This scene is not, or not quite, a pathetic fallacy in which weather represents human feelings. In his book, Tarkovsky explains that the scene came about because he wanted to avoid the cliché of the man turning to wave mid-way along the path. His turning to acknowledge the magical

gust of wind does the trick, but there remains an uncanny quality to it. Tarkovsky always insisted that nature was as much, if not more, of a character in his films than any person. Yet when his images capture an intensity of emotion, they are not suggestive of specific feelings; fire, rain, mist all remain concretely themselves, not merely symbolic of a particular human mood.

The second most important influence on Tarkovsky, one that lasts right through his career, is classical, pre-modern painting. Of course, he's not the first film director to cite great paintings, but the strict reverence you see in true believer Tarkovsky probably grew out of the fact that the practice of religious art was suppressed in the Soviet Union. Renaissance masterpieces were not as commodified as in the West, and one probably had to appreciate their devotional qualities silently or in private, which feeds into 19th century ideas of the lonely genius, as epitomised by the director's portrait of the titular icon painter during the 15th-century Tartar invasion of Russia in *Andrei Rublev*. "The artist is always a servant," he tells us, "perpetually trying to pay for the gift that has been given to him as if by a miracle... Genius is revealed not in the absolute perfection of the [artist's] work but in absolute fidelity to himself, in commitment to his own passion."

This now unfashionably lofty attitude leads us from the boy leafing through a book of Leonardo da Vinci's works in *Ivan's Childhood* – a youth whose childhood has been snatched from him by war and who is acting as a reconnaissance scout, often crossing behind enemy lines – to da Vinci's painting *The Adoration of the Magi*, which is central to the theme of *The Sacrifice* and can be seen in the film on the wall of the house of Alexander, who tries to save the world from nuclear destruction through occult acts. Paintings also help us to track Tarkovsky's forward influence. Pieter Bruegel's *The Hunters in the Snow* is not only 'quoted' in *Mirror* and seen in Tarkovsky's science-fiction psychological drama *Solaris*, but also appears in Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011); images drawn from Mantegna's *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* can be found both in *Solaris* and in Andrey Zvyagintsev's *The Return* (2003).

Paintings influenced Tarkovsky's use of space within the frame. He often sought



Tarkovsky's *Mirror* (1974)





GETTY IMAGES (2)

Andrei Tarkovsky on set of *Mirror*: 'The artist is always a servant, perpetually trying to pay for the gift that has been given to him as if by a miracle'



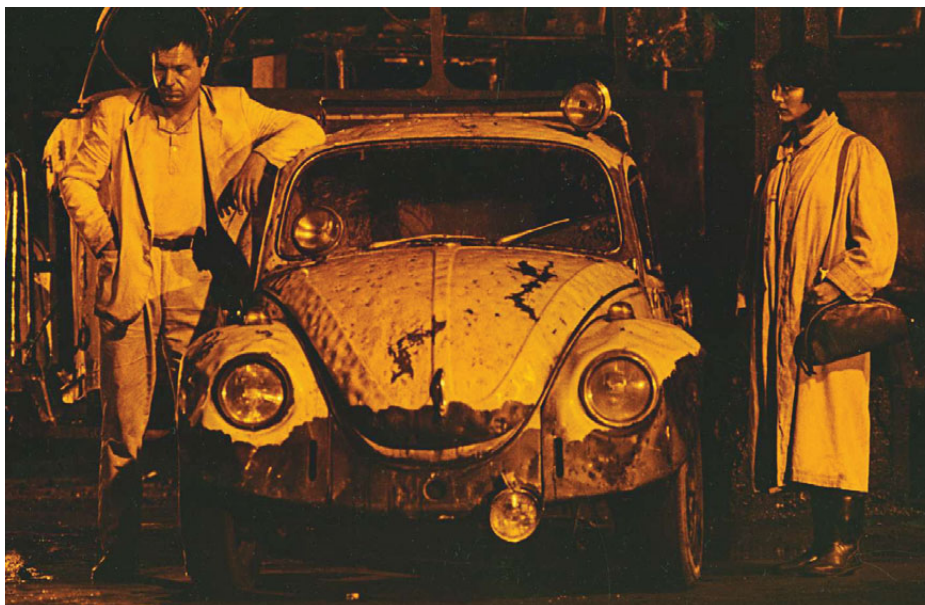
to flatten out the image, and to spatially divide the contents of the frame as in Russian icon paintings (something taken further by his fellow countryman Aleksandr Sokurov), or to spread people across a landscape in the exact manner of Breugel. I'm only touching here on a wealth of painterly references – for instance, the visit to Piero Della Francesca's *Madonna del Parto* that opens *Nostalgia*, Tarkovsky's study of homesickness made after he left Russia for good, and Caspar David Friedrich's *The Ruins of Eldena*, which inspires the astonishing image that closes the film. That said, I'm not suggesting Tarkovsky was blind to modernism – though there's not the space here to explore his interest in it. In fact, his reuse of these pre-20th-century works is typically postmodern.

Of the filmmakers who influenced Tarkovsky, those he himself cites combine key Russian forbears – Pudovkin, Eisenstein, Dovzhenko – with a familiar list of post-war international masters: Antonioni, Bergman, Bresson, Buñuel, Dreyer, Fellini and Kurosawa. Tarkovsky's indebtedness here is probably best exemplified by what happened after he left the Soviet Union. To make *Nostalgia*, he borrowed many of his friend Antonioni's collaborators, including screenwriter Tonino Guerra, and the film plays almost as much like a late Antonioni film of geometric obsession as it does any other Tarkovsky film. His second post-Soviet film, and his last, *The Sacrifice*, is partly a tribute to Bergman, and partly a last flourish, all houses blazing. Critics tend to regard these two films as his weakest, but by the time he made them he was already regarded as one of the pantheon.

Of the Russians, Dovzhenko is Tarkovsky's true forbear, and given that his *Earth* (1930) opens with wheatfields sparkling in crisp monochrome, with wind playing over the stalks, and that we see these fields 'stand' for the Russian steppe, one wonders why it is we think of the later filmmaker as owning that particular landscape. Eisenstein, on the other hand, was the forefather Tarkovsky broke from. Tarkovsky's insistence that the capture of real time was important to the uniqueness of cinema put him at odds with Eisenstein's theory of rapid montage, yet there are many echoes of Eisenstein's epic films in *Andrei Rublev*.

Critics tend to link Tarkovsky's approaches to time to Gilles Deleuze's theory of what he calls the 'time image', his argument, here simplified, being that since World War II, the employment of images designed to move a dramatic narrative forward through cuts in the classic Hollywood sense – which Deleuze calls the 'movement image' – has been surpassed in important filmmaking by the time image, one that acknowledges and uses the passing of actual time. There is some speculation that Tarkovsky would have been familiar with Henri Bergson's *Time and Free Will*, whose arguments lay behind Deleuze's ideas. Certainly the belief that immediate experience and intuition are more significant than abstract rationalism would chime with the Russian's philosophy. Tarkovsky himself, however, pins his use of time to what he feels cinema is best at.

"Cinema came into being as a means of



Arthouse noir: Lars von Trier's *The Element of Crime* (1984)

recording the very movement of reality; factual, specific, within time and unique; of reproducing again and again the moment, instant by instant, in its fluid mutability... The virtue of cinema is that it appropriates time, complete with that material reality to which it is indissolubly bound, and which surrounds us day by day and hour by hour.... The image becomes authentically cinematic when (amongst other things) not only does it live within time, but time also lives within it, even within each separate frame... The image is not a certain meaning, expressed by the director, but an entire world reflected in a drop of water."

This use of time is what gives Tarkovsky's influence perhaps its strongest foundation, for it enables dreams to be depicted in as concrete a fashion as reality – as in *Ivan's Childhood* – or for a former warzone to be transformed by the imagination into a psychic labyrinth of hidden invisible traps, as in *Stalker*.

If one is considering which of Tarkovsky's films are the most influential on the filmmakers listed below, *Mirror* and *Stalker* are the ones that seem to be the strongest, but all seven of his films get plundered regularly.

In his seminal 1973 book *The Anxiety of Influence*, literary critic Harold Bloom writes, "Poetic influence need not make poets less original, as often it makes them more original." That certainly applies to the filmmakers cited below as Tarkovskians. What's curious about my choice of Tarkovsky-influenced films is that so many of them were made around the Millennium; indeed four were made in the same year, 2002. That's an indication of how Tarkovsky's films continue to dominate not only ideas of the sublime in cinema but also the cinema of apocalyptic portent. Bloom's great

*Have you seen 'Mirror'? I was hypnotised! I've seen it 20 times. It's the closest thing I've got to a religion – to me Tarkovsky is a god*

argument is that Shakespeare is so dominant an influence on the Western canon of literature that he practically invented the way we talk to one another. I'm not about to claim that Tarkovsky is as dominant a figure in arthouse film aesthetics. But Bloom also says that Shakespeare's "energies so fuse rhetoric, psychology, and cosmology that we cannot distinguish them from one another". Tarkovsky's energies created their own unique fusion: of visualised elemental poetry; extremely intense characters and events; the equalisation of reality, memory and dream; and a faith in intuition over rationality and, for better or worse, of God over man.

**The 12 films below, as well as all seven of Tarkovsky's features and his early shorts, are playing in the 'Sight & Sound' Deep Focus programme 'Mirroring Tarkovsky: The Great Director and His Disciples' at the BFI Southbank, London, in October and November.**

### 1 *The Element of Crime*

Lars von Trier, 1984

Since the beginning of his career, arch provocateur Lars von Trier's praise for Tarkovsky has never faltered. He's been saying he's seen *Mirror* 20 times since at least 2003, when *Trier on von Trier* was published. Yet, at the 2009 Cannes press preview for his violent religio-sexual parable *Antichrist*, there was an audible gasp when the end credit came up, "Dedicated to Andrei Tarkovsky 1932-1986", probably because the Russian director has so rarely been associated with violence (except, perhaps, in the case of the horse that was killed during the making of *Andrei Rublev*). "Have you seen *Mirror*?" von Trier asked critic David Jenkins apropos *Antichrist*. "I was hypnotised! I've seen it 20 times. It's the closest thing I've got to a religion – to me he is a god. And if I didn't dedicate the film to Tarkovsky, then everyone would say I was stealing from him."

*Antichrist*, then, was an obvious temptation for this list, but the much earlier *The Element of Crime* – von Trier's first feature – is a more



guileless Tarkovskian work, one besotted not only with *Mirror* but also *Solaris* and *Stalker*. The opening image is of an ass rolling in dust in imitation of a horse that does the same in *Andrei Rublev*. In his surgery, a flyblown doctor berates an unseen man for always coming back to Cairo for help with his headaches and suggests he needs to go back into his memory of 13 years ago in Europe. He suggests hypnosis and soon we're watching one of those *Stalker* shots that track across mysterious objects submerged in water as our unseen hero's voice quotes Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', "Water, water, everywhere, nor any drop to drink," as he goes under the trance. The Europe he recalls is a decaying, dystopian, post-industrial nightmare shot mostly in black and white with a sickly amber tint. Michael Elphick plays our hero, Fisher, a former detective who must return in his mind to his last case in post-war Germany, a hunt for the 'lotto murderer', who kills girls who sell lottery tickets. The film is a catalogue of visual ideas inspired by Tarkovsky, of leaking water, souging wind, unexpected fire and constant reflections, with von Trier already linking them to violence. It plays out as if a writer of slightly clumsy hard-boiled fictions was inserting the conventions of *film noir* into an urban night-time version of *Stalker's* Zone. As such, it's pretty compelling, and a brilliant, complex spectacle of visual ideas for a first-time director to pull off.

## 2 **Three Colours: Red** Krzysztof Kieslowski, 1994

On the principle that influence is a continuous process among near-contemporaries, I've included this work by a director whose career overlapped with Tarkovsky's. Kieslowski was just nine years younger than his Russian counterpart, they both died in their mid-50s, and they shared the experience of working first under the Soviet bloc and later in the West as émigrés. Kieslowski was the more prolific, making twice as many feature-length works. He started as a documentary filmmaker and remained more focused on people as protagonists than Tarkovsky, who preferred them to operate as ciphers, and he also worked a lot in television, which Tarkovsky more or less ignored. Yet both directors share an unusually intense concern with the metaphysical. In Kieslowski's case that was played off an equal interest in the moral consequences of decisions, shared with his screenwriting partner Krzysztof Piesiewicz, an ex-lawyer. *Three Colours: Red* is the third part of a trilogy based on the French motto of liberty, equality and fraternity. *Blue*, under 'liberty', looked at grief, romantic jealousy and the nature of authorship; *White*, under 'equality', was a blackly comic portrait of a Polish man who loses everything when his wife divorces him, but then climbs back to a position where he can enact revenge. *Red* was Kieslowski's final film and it focuses, with valedictory fellow feeling, on the things that might bind recalcitrant people together.

A model, Valentine (Irène Jacob), accidentally runs over a German Shepherd dog and takes the injured pet back to its owner, Joseph (Jean-Louis Trintignant), a retired judge, who seems indifferent to its fate and gives the dog to her.



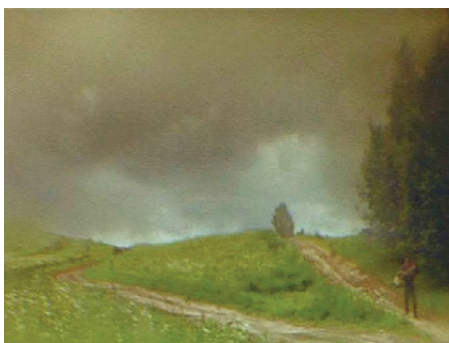
Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Three Colours: Red* (1994)

After the dog has recovered, she takes it to the park and it runs away. She tracks it back to the judge and, later, discovers that he secretly listens in to the phone conversations of his neighbours. Traces of the Tarkovskian are subtle here. There's something in the way the interior of Joseph's house is shot, how the camera prowls its corridors, how its doors are left open to the elements, combined with an overt concern for unexpected light and sound – a bulb blows while Valentine is present; the talk the judge is snooping in on brings an extra dimension of simultaneous presence and absence. There's something too about the way Irène Jacob is lit and framed indoors that's reminiscent of Margarita Terekhova in *Mirror*.

## 3 **Mother and Son** Aleksandr Sokurov, 1997

On his death bed, Tarkovsky identified Sokurov as his successor. They had become friends and Sokurov returned the compliment by making a black-and-white documentary about Tarkovsky, *Moscow Elegy* (1988), originally intended as a 50th birthday tribute for the director in 1982, and which shared some of the same material from the set of *The Sacrifice* that Tonino Guerra used in his biodoc *Voyage in Time* (1983) and Chris Marker gathered for his *One Day in the Life of Andrei Arsenevich* (1999).

Around the time of the release of *Mother and Son*, Sokurov told Paul Schrader: "The first time I saw [Tarkovsky's] work was when I was finishing my education at the Film Academy. His aesthetics weren't a discovery for me, rather it was a confirmation of my own vision" – a remark typical of Bloom's 'anxiety of influence'. Certainly, the older director was not the only influence on Sokurov's complex works – Japanese cinema is as powerful a presence in his films. And in *Mother and Son* – Sokurov's exquisitely



Aleksandr Sokurov's *Mother and Son* (1997)

beautiful study of the intense bond between a young man and his dying mother during her final day – there's the acknowledged influence of classical art. The opening image, for instance, of the son (Alexei Ananishnov) leaning over his bedridden mother (Gudrun Geyer), is stretched in an optical effect similar to (if less extreme than) the skull in Holbein's *The Ambassadors* and lit in a way that's inescapably reminiscent of the chiaroscuro of Caravaggio. For much of the film's 75 minutes the son walks around with his tiny swaddled mother carried in his arms in a kind of reversed *pietà*. Sokurov's visual scheme came out of a desire to flatten the image – using mirrors and angled panes of painted glass – so that its picture plane was more like the anti-perspective of Russian icons, and he and DP Aleksey Fyodorov were said to have travelled to Berlin to look at Caspar David Friedrich's paintings, particularly 'The Monk by the Sea'.

Nonetheless, no one could doubt that *Mother and Son* is steeped in the elegiac Tarkovskian mode. Very quickly after that opening shot we see the grasslands of the steppe whipped into magical life just as they are in *Mirror*. Image after image seems as evocative of Tarkovsky's misty polaroids as of Friedrich's paintings. There's broken sunlight, billows of dust, mist shifting in ways that Tarkovsky had no right to claim as his own but somehow did. Which other filmmaker has mixed up Russian mother-reverence with dreams in such distinctive fashion? Whose cinema do we think of when a reverence for classical art combines with a presentation of nature that makes it as central a protagonist as people? The two directors also shared a sincere belief. When Schrader asked Sokurov how he managed to achieve his complicated images, he said: "God was probably assisting us at that time."

## 4 **Werckmeister Harmonies** Béla Tarr & Agnes Hranitzky, 2000

Béla Tarr is usually treated as the sole auteur of his films, and talks as if he were, describing himself as a "total autocrat" on set, even though Agnes Hranitzky, his editor and wife, has been credited as co-director from *Werckmeister Harmonies* onwards. But Tarr holds the sole director credit on *Damnation* (1988), the film with which his entire approach to his cinema changed from social realism to the high stylisation for which he has subsequently become known (although some elements of the transformation were evident in 1984's *Almanac of Fall*). With *Damnation* he first allied himself



Werckmeister Harmonies (2000)



to the screenwriter-novelist László Krasznahorkai, embraced monochrome film, and became the lion of the long take, pushing its possibilities much further than anyone had done before him – *ergo* Tarr and the film were immediately labelled Tarkovskian.

*Werckmeister Harmonies*, an allegory of the Soviet bloc years in Hungary, concerns a small town beset by apocalyptic rumours. A circus has arrived that boasts a huge mobile shed containing a dead whale and a mysterious rabble-rousing figure called The Prince. Young idealist János (Lars Rudolph) is approached by his aunt Tünde (Hanna Schygulla) to oblige his uncle György (Peter Fitz) to gather financial donors to help restore control, or else she will return to bother him. The move fails and riots ensue. There are several scenes reminiscent of Tarkovsky's, but the most obvious is a shot that focuses on the profiles of János and György as they walk through town to the rhythmic sound of something clinking; this echoes the famous scene in *Stalker* in which Stalker, the Professor and the Writer ride a flat-bed rail cart and the camera switches between close-ups of each while the machine rattles in rhythm. (Gus Van Sant's *Gerry* completes a third link by directly copying Tarr's profile-on-profile walking scene). But Tarr is no mere copyist of Tarkovsky and the differences between them are best expressed by Tarr himself. "Tarkovsky is religious and we are not... he always had hope; he believed in God. He's much more innocent than us – than me. No, we have seen too many things to make his kind of film... he is much softer, much nicer. Rain in his films purifies people. In mine it just makes mud." *Werckmeister Harmonies* is made up of just 39 single-camera takes. If there's a difference between a Tarkovsky long take and a Tarr one, it is probably found in Jacques Rancière's observation: "The Tarr long take tells as time itself would tell – as a time indifferent to the human experience of time."

## 5 *Uzak* Nuri Bilge Ceylan, 2002

For a direct match with Tarkovsky from Ceylan's films one might have preferred *Kasaba* (1997), a village portrait whose extreme sensitivity to ethereal sound, and the idea of landscape as a presence and fire as a binder of community has particular exemplary force. However, it's hard to resist *Uzak* (*Distant*), since it directly quotes from several Tarkovsky films, one in particular. Mahmut (Muzaffer Ozdemir) is a middle-aged photographer habituated to living alone, comfortably, in Istanbul (the apartment in the film is the director's own). When his young cousin Yusuf (Emin Toprak) has to leave his village to seek work in Istanbul, Mahmut is obliged to put him up, and odd-couple tensions wind tight from the start. Istanbul is miserably snowbound, hardly convenient job-seeking weather, but this was not a matter of Tarkovskian design – it just snowed at the time of the shoot.

The direct quote scene – designed to further reveal Mahmut's snobbery towards his cousin – has Mahmut watching *Stalker* on TV in the evening while Yusuf dozes in a chair. Yusuf, bored, says he's going to bed. As soon as he's sure Yusuf's gone, Mahmut puts on a porn DVD



Cold Turkey: Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Uzak* (2002)

*In 'Uzak' Nuri Bilge Ceylan reminds us that the one quality absent from Tarkovsky's films is a sense of humour*

and turns down the sound. Meanwhile, Yusuf quietly calls his mother to insist she gets a tooth pulled – a moment reminiscent of the scene in which the adult Alexei talks to his mother on the phone in *Mirror*. At one point Yusuf says, "Nuri always gives credit," presumably referring to the dentist. When Mahmut hears Yusuf coming back into the room, he flips the switch to regular TV fare, which makes Yusuf want to linger, so he switches it off. Later, we see Mahmut lying in bed, watching a documentary about Tarkovsky that cuts from a scene in *Nostalgia* to one from *Mirror*. Ceylan shows here that he understands the anxiety of influence and is willing to mock

both Tarkovsky and himself in a highly comical way, thereby reminding us too that the one quality absent from the Russian's films is a sense of humour. Ceylan does indeed always give credit.

## 6 *Gerry* Gus Van Sant, 2002

What seems in retrospect astonishing – that Matt Damon and Casey Affleck would be in a such a spare low-budget film that, in storytelling terms, has nothing going on but the cinematography – was even outrageous at the time. People got excited about the five-minute opening scene, which is set to Arvo Pärt's aching piano and viola piece 'Spiegel im Spiegel' and which switches between a shot from the rear following a car heading into desert country, a head-on full windscreen shot of the two men in the car with a low sun behind them, and a view of the road directly ahead – but many lost interest thereafter. Tarkovsky's influence here is at one remove, via Béla Tarr, whom Gus Van



Riddle of the sands: Gus Van Sant's *Gerry* (2002)



Sant thanks in the credits. Van Sant's minimalist approach came about partly as a result of watching *Werckmeister Harmonies* and *Sátántangó*, but he also cites Tarkovsky as an influence. After they get out of the car and diegetic sound arrives in the form of boots crunching gravel, there's a sense of vague purpose as the two young men, who both go by the name Gerry, enter a path signed 'Wilderness Trail'. We're never told which wilderness, but the film was shot in Death Valley, the Utah salt flats and Argentina. What happens is that they walk and walk, mostly in silence, and get lost. At one point Affleck's Gerry finds himself stuck up on a rock that's about 25 feet high and Damon's Gerry makes him a "dirt mattress" on to which he can jump without hurting himself.

Aside from the film's concentration on landscape, perhaps a second link with Tarkovsky is via Samuel Beckett. Our Gerrys share with *Stalker's* Writer, Professor and Stalker an affinity with Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*. Is it a stretch to suggest that the desert they walk into and get lost in – a landscape that's hardly Tarkovskian – constitutes a parched version of the Zone? Any film that devotes itself to the passing of real mundane time in long takes of people walking about in gorgeous but terrifyingly austere surroundings would have been unthinkable without the cult success of *Stalker*. I was in Utah once with Tom Luddy, the artistic director of the Telluride Film Festival. As we were admiring some colossal mesas, Tom said, "I brought Tarkovsky here, you know. I explained how mesas were formed by the oceans millions of years ago and Tarkovsky just said, 'No. God made this.'"

## 7 Japón

Carlos Reygadas, 2002

"*Japón* is the best Tarkovsky film Tarkovsky never made," opined *Financial Times* critic Nigel Andrews, and who's to argue? A debut as stylistically precocious as von Trier's, *Japón* seems to have borrowed the basis of its story from another Russian, from Solzhenitsyn's novella *Matryona's Place*, in which a teacher on a collective farm is obliged to share a single room with his landlady, and becomes embroiled in her exploitation by a relative, who wants the wood from her shed for his own uses. Here it's white stone the nephew wants. Reygadas transforms the teacher into an unnamed middle-aged man with a serious limp who seeks out a remote Mexican canyon under a dazzling near-hallucinogenic sun as a place where he can quietly top himself. He asks among the hillside locals for somewhere to stay and is taken to see the elderly Ascen – named, as she tells us, after Christ's ascension to heaven, not Mary's – who lives in extreme poverty, but has a barn. In a dream, a beautiful woman in a bikini – perhaps a deceased wife or lover – indicates he should transfer his affections to his aged landlady, who becomes, as the story plays out, a kind of female Christ figure.

In 2002, sublime minimalism ruled and it seems to have been the peak year for combining Tarkovsky influences with the music of Arvo Pärt: *Japón* has the composer's 'Miserere' being played in the car that gives the suicidal protagonist a lift at the beginning and ends at the scene of a railway



Carlos Reygadas's *Japón* (2002)

accident with 'Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten'. In a way *Japón* has a similar strategy to *The Banishment* in that its Tarkovskian bouquets tend to punctuate events – the camera's dipping perusal of a pile of logs; a hot dry rock suddenly wet with large drops of water; a tiny mirror that catches a character in profile; 360-degree pans as seen in *Andrei Rublev* – yet these are much more successfully integrated into the unfolding drama. In 2003, Reygadas told *Sight & Sound*: "When I was about 15, my father gave me a Tarkovsky film on VHS and I was amazed at the simplicity, the power that comes out of a single event. I'm not very much into narrative-driven films and I never remember dialogue; what sticks in my mind are the sound, the image and the camera movement. With Tarkovsky it's as if direct emotion comes out of each image and sound. It drives me crazy."

## 8 Solaris

Steven Soderbergh, 2002

When is a remake not a tribute? Perhaps when the auteur remaking the film goes out of his way to be as un-Tarkovskian as possible. Soderbergh's *Solaris* was touted as a return to Stanislaw Lem's 1961 novel rather than to Tarkovsky's film, yet both films follow closely the outline story of Kris Kelvin (George Clooney here), a psychologist in the future who is informed by his friend on a space station on the planet Solaris of an interesting phenomenon. Arriving there, Kelvin finds his friend has committed suicide, and the surviving two team members seem strangely distracted. Exhausted, Kelvin finds his cabin and goes to sleep.

In Soderbergh's version, Kelvin dreams of intimate moments he shared with his dead wife Rheya (Natascha McElhone), and when he awakes, Rheya is manifested alive in the room. Horrified, Kelvin finds a way to launch



Claire Denis's *The Intruder* (2004)



Steven Soderbergh's *Solaris* (2002)

her into space, but then she, or a replica version of her, comes back, created, it seems, by the oceanic planet out of Kelvin's sublimated desires. Soderbergh's focus is much more on this rekindled love story, whereas Tarkovsky's emphasis was on nostalgia for the earth and its natural beauty. In Soderbergh's version there are also numerous flashbacks to Kelvin's life with Rheya, something Tarkovsky eschews.

The American takes Dylan Thomas's poem 'And Death Shall Have No Dominion', with its emphasis on the idea that "though lovers be lost, love shall not", and sidelines all other grand themes. The result is crisper and, at 99 minutes, much shorter than the original's 165 minutes. Of course it's extremely doubtful that Soderbergh, Clooney and co would ever have adapted Lem's novel had Tarkovsky not transformed it into one of the most original science-fiction films ever made. Perhaps remaking a masterpiece your own way is the sincerest form of cinema flattery.

## 9 The Intruder

Claire Denis, 2004

Claire Denis worked as a casting director on *The Sacrifice*, and, of this selection, *The Intruder* is arguably the film that does most to explore discontinuity of time and space in a way that recalls Tarkovsky's innovations and his near-equal treatment of realist event, dream and contemplation. But again, as with Sokurov, there is a more prominent influence here. The film is an 'adoption' of the ideas expressed in French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's autobiographical essay about his heart transplant – in a wider sense, how one can accept an 'intruder' without destroying their otherness through assimilation – but the film also explores Nancy's ideas about landscape in a way that both recalls and challenges Tarkovsky. "Landscape begins when it absorbs and dissolves all presences into itself," argues Nancy in another essay, 'Uncanny Landscape', positing that the way we view landscape always involves our taking in a 'corner' of it, a space that simultaneously encloses and discloses itself. But his conclusion is that we discover in landscape "the place without God, the place that is only the place of taking place". Denis's invented fable certainly matches the 'you only live once' quality of that conclusion.

Louis Trebor (Michel Subor), is an ex-mercenary with heart problems who is hiding out in the Jura Mountains in the Western Alps from people who have reasons to take revenge on him. He virtually ignores





his son Sidney, who lives in the nearby town, and pines instead for the child he fathered in his youth with a Tahitian woman. After murdering an intruder, he arranges to have an illegal private heart transplant in Korea, insisting on a young male donor, but the outcome proves unsatisfactory in more ways than one and he's left to wander the South Seas in a hopeless reverie. Few films are as bold and complex with their time logic and their associative leaps as this, and Tarkovsky remains its obvious progenitor.

## 10 The New World

Terrence Malick, 2005

Malick was born in 1943, two years after Kieslowski, but it's hard now to see him as a near contemporary of Tarkovsky in the same way, even though *Badlands*, his first feature, made a big international impact in 1973, while the Polish director had to wait until 1989 for his breakthrough with *The Decalogue*. *Badlands* certainly has echoes of Tarkovsky in the way it admires burnished wheatfields in the magic hour, but when Malick began developing that film – given how long films tend to gestate – he is likely only to have seen *Ivan's Childhood* and *Andrei Rublev* (*Solaris* was made in 1972).

Malick's *Days of Heaven* (1978), on the other hand, with its vivid conflagrations, came after *Mirror*'s unforgettable barn fires. There might have been an interesting mutual call and answer between the directors had Malick not had a 20-year filmmaking hiatus until *The Thin Red Line* in 1998, long after Tarkovsky's death. That film traced the outline of a completely different style, one that's given us – arguably with dwindling effect – *The New World*, *The Tree of Life*, *To the Wonder* and *Knight of Cups*. The old Malick was a serious rival to Tarkovsky, the new one feels more contemporary to today: scooping surfaces, prowling for evidence of the divine, but settling always for the sheer wonder of the world in a sunset. But curiously, the new Malick is an overt devotee of Tarkovsky – there are many images in *The Tree of Life* that match Tarkovsky's, not least the scene in which Jessica Chastain levitates – as the mother does in *Mirror* and the writer and the maid do in *The Sacrifice*. Nonetheless I've chosen *The New World* because it shows the new Malick style in its best light, in a context – the arrival of British colonists in Virginia – in which wonder and mistrust between pagans (the Native Americans, particularly Pocahontas) and Christians is expressed in a similar way to that in *Andrei Rublev*. This is especially evident in the scenes

## Many of Zvyagintsev's shots of lustrous or weather-obscured landscapes are so redolent of Tarkovsky as to approach parody

of bathing in the river, and when Captain Smith blunders through a swamp in his armour and gets captured, almost in a parody of the finesse with which young Ivan ghosts behind German lines.

## 11 The Banishment

Andrey Zvyagintsev, 2007

Zvyagintsev's second feature (after *The Return*) is the most straightforward, even blatant, case of Tarkovsky's influence in action. Many of his shots of lustrous or weather-obscured landscapes are so redolent of the master as to approach parody. It might seem surprising to make this observation about an adaptation of a William Saroyan novel involving such dramatic tropes as jealousy, uncertain progeniture and criminal brothers, but over-enthusiastic mini-tributes to Tarkovsky, set to one side of the drama, act here as a kind of punctuation.

Alex (Konstantin Lavronenko), under pressure due to corrupt business failings, needs to disappear from the city for a while. He takes his family to his magnificent childhood home, set next to a church in a secluded ravine. He and his wife Vera (the dazzling Maria Bonnevie) are not getting along, and when she reluctantly tells him she's pregnant, he has suspicions. These are confirmed in his mind when he learns from his son that a friend, Robert, visited their city house while Alex was away. Alex consults his racketeer gambler brother, Mark (Aleksandr Baluev), who tells him, fatalistically, that whatever he wants to do – kill or forgive – will be right.

There is a hint of Bergman about how the scenes from a marriage play out – touching at first, then grim and agonising – but Tarkovsky looms over it all. The specially constructed house and church are drawn from Andrew Wyeth paintings, yet the way the house is shot constantly recalls the country houses in *Mirror* and *The Sacrifice*. In long takes the camera meanders in typical Tarkovskian style through birch trees; in quicker ones it sweeps across fields of golden wheatgrass; the children spend an evening piecing together a jigsaw puzzle of Leonardo da Vinci's 'The Annunciation' (Da Vinci is a constant reference in Tarkovsky's films); a palpably Tarkovskian mist drapes itself over the surroundings. Most blatant of all is a long


tracking shot that moves over streams and pools of water covering poignant debris. It climaxes with a downpour, apeing similar sequences in *Stalker* and *Nostalgia*. When confronted about these tributes, Zvyagintsev said, "It's impossible for any Russian filmmaker not to feel a certain influence from Tarkovsky." *The Banishment* is nonetheless a magnificent yarn and, from the evidence of the director's last film, *Leviathan* (2014), we can conclude that he's probably got the excess Tarkovsky out of his system.

## 12 The Headless Woman

Lucrecia Martel, 2008

Of all the films here, this is probably the greatest stretch in terms of influence, the tip of a tendril if you like. Martel is a very distinctive director, and her work comes out of her knowledge of the people of north-west Argentina, where she's from. She moves from cut to cut quickly, yet her pacing is slow. *The Headless Woman*'s visual style is not particularly reminiscent of Tarkovsky's, except for the extrasensory quality she seems to have – a sensitivity to the power of boredom and objects and the hidden lives of houses.

In the film, Vero (María Onetto) is a middle-aged dentist who's been meeting with her girlfriends. Driving along a seemingly deserted road, she is enjoying a solo singalong when her mobile phone rings, making her take her eye off the wheel for a moment. Her car runs over something, in two bumps, and she hits her head. Stunned and shaken, she brings the car to a halt, stares in her wing mirror for several beats and then drives on. In a rear-view shot, as the car pulls away, we see a dog lying motionless in the road. Vero seems completely distracted and appears to be suffering from concussion. Colleagues, family and servants make excuses for her. Eventually she confesses to her husband that she thinks she might have killed someone; he refuses to believe her, saying she's just frightened. Her car gets fixed and every anxiety is smoothed away almost invisibly until we find out what really happened.

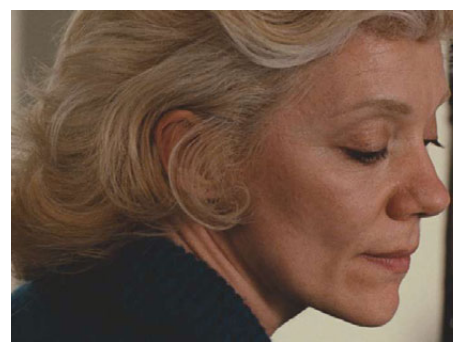
The great success of Martel and Onetto in this film is the way Vero is able to be simultaneously of and not of this world, the sense that her sudden vulnerability and inability to connect with real things is not a ruse but an altered state of consciousness, a kind of floating above the guilt she feels. Her mother mutters in her sleep about the dead and tells Vero her voice has changed. These things 'feel' Tarkovskian. In a way, Vero's the very opposite of the boy in *Ivan's Childhood*: he's a ruined innocent, she's a sinner preserved. 



Terrence Malick's *The New World* (2005)



Andrey Zvyagintsev's *The Banishment* (2007)



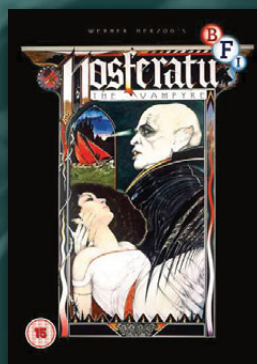
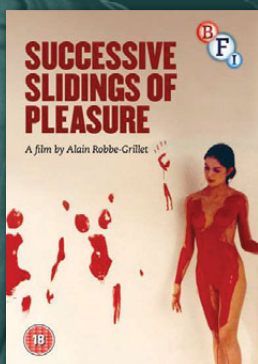
Lucrecia Martel's *The Headless Woman* (2008)





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Image: Stalker



PROFILE

## VALPARAISO MON AMOUR

Valeria Sarmiento's collaborations with her husband, Raúl Ruiz, have overshadowed her own distinctive directorial career

By Ian Christie

When *Lines of Wellington* premiered at the Venice Festival in 2012, it was widely seen as Raúl Ruiz's last, posthumous work. In fact, though Ruiz had started work on the project before he died in 2011, it was directed by his widow and longtime collaborator Valeria Sarmiento – her seventh feature in a career that stretches back to 1972, which has included directing more than 20 films, as well as editing 50. And while taking over *Lines of Wellington* was to some extent a labour of love, it's clear that Sarmiento steered it in a different direction from her husband.

"It would have been impossible to make it as he might have," she says. Sarmiento was attracted by the social backdrop of the Peninsular War, when Napoleon's army met its first major defeat, by the forces of General Wellesley, later Duke of Wellington. Reading Carlos Saboga's script, she found herself thinking about exile (Saboga was an exile from Salazar's Portugal who has remained in France; Sarmiento and Ruiz were long exiled from their native Chile); and she thought about the female characters, to whom she would give "more substance".

As reshaped by Sarmiento, the film focuses largely on a variety of women, young and old, and the impact this peculiarly modern war had on their lives, as the fighting spread across Portugal. Having lived through the violent overthrow of Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government in Chile in 1973, Sarmiento could hardly fail to be reminded of the brutal treatment of many of her contemporaries by the thugs of the Pinochet regime that followed: "I thought about friends, people who had been raped and killed, the fact that it's the civilians who suffer most in wars, and I think it's this that gives the film its emotion."

What the film largely avoids is conventional scenes of battle, reflecting Sarmiento's dislike of violence on screen, but also the nature of the Peninsular War: it was a war of attrition, in which the Spanish and Portuguese irregulars – who gave English the word 'guerrilla' – harassed Masséna's superior French force, before it was checked by Wellesley's elaborate defences at Torres Vedras, outside Lisbon. I was reminded of Brecht's anti-heroic portrayal of women and camp-followers during the Thirty Years' War in his play *Mother Courage*. But a more immediate inspiration turns out to have been King Vidor's 1956 film *War and Peace* – recommended by the producer Paulo Branco for its portrayal of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow.

Branco urged Sarmiento to take over the Wellington project after Ruiz's death. The fact that she had edited two thirds of Ruiz's prolific output

over nearly 40 years undoubtedly hampered her own career, though as she observes this was often an economic necessity during their early years as refugees in France, when it was Ruiz's projects that attracted funding. A passionate cinephile during her childhood in Valparaíso, accompanying her father to all the new European and American films, in 1967 she jumped at the chance to join Chile's first film school, headed by Aldo Francia – he would become one of the founders of Chilean cinema with his *Valparaíso, mi amor* (1970). But the school was short-lived. When Allende's radical government came to power in 1970 she soon became involved in films that proclaimed its ideals, such as *Popular Poetry: Theory and Practice* and *New Chilean Song*, celebrating Chile's politicised 'new song' movement. Working alongside Carlos Piaggio and Ruiz, by now her husband, she learned "to do everything", and began to specialise in editing.

The first film she directed alone showed her

interest in the lives of women: *Un sueño como de colores* (1972), a documentary about striptease performers. Among the era's heavily political films, it caught the attention of one visitor to Latin America's first Marxist democracy, the Hungarian director Miklós Jancsó. Sarmiento was encouraged, but had no chance to continue in the same vein. She and Ruiz escaped the round-up of Allende supporters that followed the coup of September 1973 and came to Europe, soon settling in Paris. One early film they made together, *Dialogues of Exiles* (1975), sparked controversy in progressive circles for its candid portrayal of exile behaviour. But Ruiz was soon a favoured director of offbeat documentaries for French television and genre-bending features, which Sarmiento often edited.

In the early 1980s she directed two films that staked out what has become a persistent theme: men's and women's differing outlooks on the world. The documentary *A Man, When He Is*



Sensitive to the paradoxes of history: Valeria Sarmiento, photographed in Paris in the 1970s

VALERIA SARMIENTO IN PARIS. PHOTOGRAPHY BY UZANA. FICK. CINETEC UNIVERSIDAD DE CHILE



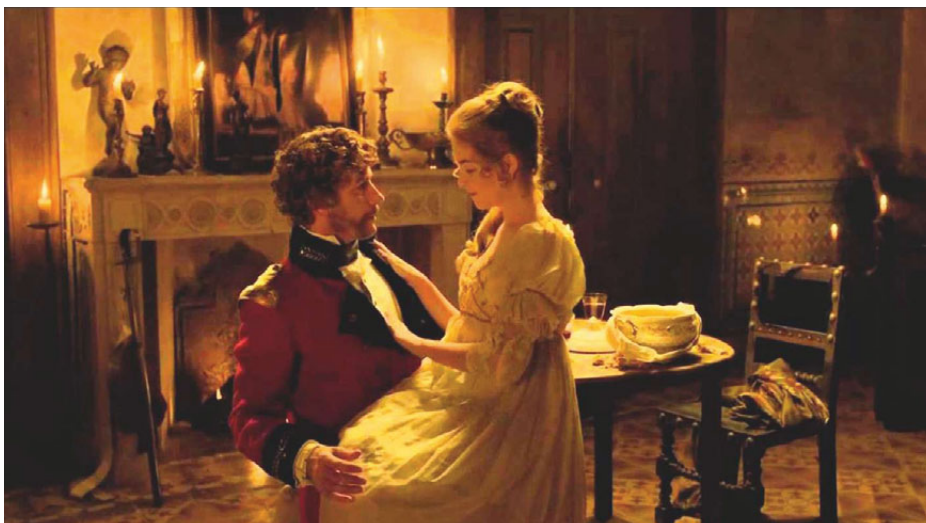
a *Man* (*El hombre cuando es hombre*, 1982), shot in Costa Rica – one of the few Latin American countries for which Sarmiento could get a visa – deals with machismo in its most extreme form. Under the pretext of making a film about romance and men who had killed for love, Sarmiento interviewed the unrepentant murderer of three women. It caused a scandal in France: the Costa Rican embassy protested to the TV station Channel 2 that “one should not give a platform to people like this”. Her first feature, made two years later in Portugal, began as a documentary about women’s romantic fiction, of the kind written by Corín Tellado, Spain’s Barbara Cartland. Ruiz encouraged her to develop it as a feature, and co-wrote what became *Notre mariage* (*Our Marriage*, 1985). Adopting what Sarmiento calls a “deadpan” approach to the romantic fiction that she herself had long enjoyed, the story traces its heroine Lola’s ambiguous attitude to the man who paid to save her life as a child and now claims her as his bride.

After Chile’s return to democracy in 1990, the two exiles began tentatively to renew their links. In Sarmiento’s case, it was to make *Amelia López O’Neill* (1991), the second in what has become a female-centred ‘trilogy of melodramas’. This was inspired by another kind of popular fiction, the radio soap opera, and shaped by Sarmiento’s native Valparaíso – its eclectic 19th-century architecture creating “a city that lends itself to melodrama”. The sheltered heroine (Laura del Sol) is ready to devote her life to Franco Nero’s distinguished doctor, a patron of the arts but also a denizen of the night, who at first takes her to be a prostitute. In the *New York Times* Caryn James responded to the gothic fusion of setting and theme: “She has turned Valparaíso into a glittering, dramatic landscape that reflects the heroine’s passionate grasp on life... Miss Sarmiento has found her own twilight zone where insane passions make sense.”

More documentaries on gender themes followed. *Latin Women Beat in California* (1993) dealt with relations among Latina women in America; the same year, for *El planeta de los niños* (*Planet of Children*), she visited a special school in Cuba where boys and girls could act out adult careers to challenge early gender stereotyping.

In 1995, Sarmiento’s third major melodrama ran the risk of being misunderstood as a feminist attack on Buñuel. Based on the same novel as Buñuel’s *El* (1953), *Elle* looked at the increasingly eccentric relationship between a domineering man and his wife from the woman’s point of view. While he tortures himself with her imagined infidelity, she cuts herself off from normality in their vast mansion and submits to his fetishistic demands. In Sarmiento’s version of Mercedes Pinto’s novel, wife and husband are equally disturbed in their *folie à deux*. Far from criticising Buñuel’s film, it was intended as a dialogue, even an *homage*. Yet *Variety* and others found the stylised performances and palatial Sofia setting artificial. For Sarmiento, this missed the ironic point: “It was intended to be understood as a game, with its own rules.”

Tone and colour have always been crucial – her favourite film is *The Red Shoes*: in *Rosa la china* (2002), shot in Havana and “steeped in



Guerrilla film-making: *Lines of Wellington* (2012)

Cuban culture and tradition, with its sense of melodrama and theatre”, every character has their own signature colour. But like all her and Ruiz’s work since leaving Chile, it is unavoidably marked by critical distance – they had their differences with those Chileans who sided with Castro, and the writer, José Triana, was a Cuban living in Paris. The film had only one festival screening in Cuba and has been seen mainly by Cuban exiles in Miami, and in Spain.

As Sarmiento’s relationship with post-Pinochet Chile has developed, she has worked out new strategies for re-engaging with her native country. *Secrets* (2008) she describes as “a black comedy about a Chile I don’t like”: it is about a former militant’s return from exile, and the evasions and revelations this triggers among the comfortable middle class. Working with enthusiastic young actors who normally appear in popular *telenovelas*, Sarmiento offered a “heightened” account of the changes that had created a different country. More recently, the television series *Diary of a Residence in Chile* (2014), made after Ruiz’s death, dramatises the diary of an Englishwoman who visited Chile in 1822. Sarmiento compares her stylised approach to Eric Rohmer’s in *The Lady and*

*I thought about friends, people who had been raped and killed, and I think it’s this that gives the film its emotion*

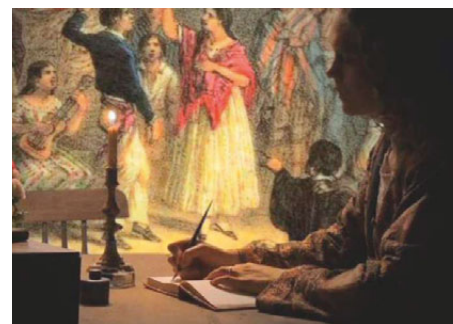


Twilight zone: *Amelia López O’Neill* (1991)

*the Duke* (2001), which used contemporary illustrations as scenery, “like those little books that open and create a false third dimension”.

Here the critique of Chile is initially her heroine’s, commenting on the country’s longstanding Anglophilia: “She thought that civilisation is English, and that everyone should try to be like the English.” But it also pokes at her naive view of the country’s founding fathers, and at Chile’s sense of superiority to its neighbours. The TV series was followed by a feature version, *Maria Graham: Diary of a Residence in Chile* – which Sarmiento feels was more “sensitive to the paradoxes of history”. And, no doubt, to the paradoxes of her own position. “Young Chileans recognise my way of speaking as different from theirs, because the language has changed, and they are sometimes curious about what it was like in the past. But older people often dislike or are suspicious of the ‘returners’.”

Sarmiento’s current projects reflect a range of priorities – organising an ambitious full-scale retrospective of all Ruiz’s work for the Cinémathèque française next year; and adapting an early novel by the cult Chilean-born writer Roberto Bolaño, *The Skating Rink* (1993), set on the Spanish Costa Brava. But in the face of too many restrictions, she has pulled out of a planned ten-part Chilean television series about family life in Chile in the 1950s, “when women had just been given the vote for the first time”. For Sarmiento, there is no question that “women look at the world differently”: finding ways of “validating this different outlook” is her mission. ☺



*Maria Graham: Diary of a Residence in Chile* (2014)



# INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTIONARIES

Two new documentaries tracing the origins of the industrial music scene suggests that it wasn't all nihilistic destruction

By Colm McAuliffe

In the post-apocalyptic world created within the cult cyberpunk film *Decoder* (1984), Einstürzende Neubauten's F.M. Einheit plays a disillusioned noise freak (also called F.M.) who spends his time immured in his home studio, observing the nocturnal movements of his partner Christiane (Christiane Felscherinow, the former teenage junkie whose life story inspired Ulrich Edel's *Christiane F*, 1981) and making tape recordings from the sounds of everyday life outside his apartment in Hamburg. While Christiane plies her trade as a sleazy peepshow worker in the Reeperbahn, F.M. treats and mistreats his recordings with all sorts of demented sonic interference and proceeds to the local H. Burger fast food joint, where he surreptitiously replaces the standard, soothing muzak with his own tapes, inducing extreme vomiting and violence among the startled punters. The ultimate effect is insurrectionary, as local punks take to the streets and begin to blast out their own tape recordings of F.M.'s anti-muzak, triggering massive street riots and urban chaos.

This technique of integrating the sounds of the immediate environment with primitive tape machines and makeshift synthesizers originates with William Burroughs's 1970 tract *The Electronic Revolution*, where he advises that "riot sound effects can produce an actual riot in a riot situation". But it is also at the core of industrial music, the movement 'officially' founded in 1975 by performance-art agitators Throbbing Gristle. *Decoder*, with its cast of industrial pioneers and a cameo by Burroughs himself, channels the political implications of industrial sound to create a deviant and nightmarish vision of the future; but the chronicling of industrial music as a movement has been rather slower to develop. Now, the arrival of two documentaries about the genre – *Industrial Soundtrack for the Urban Decay* and *B-Movie: Lust & Sound in West-Berlin 1979-1989* – suggest that the movement was not at heart all nihilism and mindless self-destruction; instead, both films focus on the environments and places that fostered and inspired musicians to explore and create these sonic experiments.

The first wave of industrial bands were outlandish provocateurs, eschewing musical ability in favour of shocking audiences with confrontational attitudes, aggressive displays of sexual transgression and sounds played at unbearably loud frequencies – a typical Throbbing Gristle performance could be punctuated by horrifying screened images purloined from extreme pornography or Nazi concentration camp footage. Amélie Ravalec and Travis Collins's *Industrial Soundtrack for the Urban Decay* calibrates archival live footage – including many clips of these early Throbbing Gristle performances – but relies primarily on talking heads to tell the story of industrial music. Interviews with Chris & Cosey, Genesis P-Orridge



The young Mark Reeder in *B-Movie: Lust & Sound in West-Berlin 1979-89*

and Cabaret Voltaire's Stephen Mallinder are interspersed with sombre images of northern England in the 1970s and early 1980s. The tone is uniformly sober and downbeat; while the likes of J.G. Ballard, the artist and sound-poet Brion Gysin and Burroughs receive due credit as progenitors of the genre, the implication throughout is that industrial music developed as a response to oppressive governmental regimes. Ravalec and Collins admit to being under severe financial constraints when putting together the documentary; but this shoestring approach helps to grasp the DIY aesthetic at the heart of industrial music, where, from the outset, the strictures imposed by economic hardship served to instil a community spirit among its practitioners.

It is Mallinder, in his reflections on

*The idea of the austerity... is part of a myth. It's too easy to buy into the grimness of it all; it was a lot of fun, a lot of excitement*

Sheffield, Cabaret Voltaire's home city and one synonymous with industrial music, who strikes the key notes. He dismisses the notion that the music was always made and performed with such monumental gravity, insisting that "the idea of the austerity... is part of a myth. It's too easy to buy into the grimness of it all; it was a lot of fun, a lot of excitement and there were a lot of things going on around that time as well as the dysfunctional nature of what Margaret



Christiane F. and F.M. Einheit in *Decoder* (1984)



Punk publisher V. Vale in *Industrial Soundtrack...*



Thatcher's government was doing." Ravalec and Collins litter their film with stock images of brick ruins and crumbling city facades, suggesting a cityscape beaten down by more than 150 years of industrial history. Yet during the mid-70s, when Cabaret Voltaire was formed, Sheffield was still one of the most prosperous cities in the UK. As Mallinder points out, the nascent industrial and electronic bands began to utilise abandoned industrial spaces to their advantage as they tuned in to the sonic spectre of the city to create this "unstructured, cacophonous noise... which was also beautiful music".

Some 600 miles away, space was also pivotal in the emergence of the harsher, more confrontational industrial music from Berlin – a city built for five million people yet only occupied by three million. In 1979, just as the German wing of industrial music began to form within these spaces, Mark Reeder, a Manchester-born musician, promoter and record label owner, jettisoned his acolytes in the Factory Record/Joy Division music scene in favour of moving to the city. Reeder is the narrator of *B-Movie: Lust & Sound in West Berlin* (co-directed by Klaus Maeck, writer of *Decoder*). Helped by some remarkable archive footage and staged re-enactments, we follow his endless quest through the city's nefarious drug-fuelled culture and his encounters with a series of exceptional figures in the industrial and burgeoning electronic music scene – including the members of Einstürzende Neubauten along with Gudrun Gut and her pioneering electronic outfit Malaria! – with a pounding Krautrock, post-punk and industrial soundtrack. Although many of the characters Reeder encounters look a little as though they are suffering the after-effects of some sort of drug binge – we witness an emaciated Blixa Bargeld doling out the shots in a local dive bar and a lethargic Nick Cave attempting to decorate the walls of his Kreuzberg flat – his restless explorations through the cut-up city skyline have a real resilience, and he proves a hyperactive and ultra-connected guide: "Berlin was like Disneyland for depressives," he remarks.

This restlessness is emphasised by the trajectory of Reeder's musical interests. While the relentless *Sturm und Drang* of Einstürzende Neubauten and their ilk populates the early years of the documentary, Reeder gradually appears to be in search of a less destructive, more fruitful existence and – rather like Stephen Mallinder and Cabaret Voltaire – begins to embrace the burgeoning electronic scene, collaborating with techno trailblazer WestBam and touring Europe with his erstwhile Mancunian colleagues New Order.

By 1989 – when both films end their narrative – industrial music was gradually emerging into the mainstream. Within a few years, Bargeld would be claiming "Silence is sexy", and the scalpel-sharp sounds of the genre were fattened up and made palatable for mainstream audiences by the likes of Nine Inch Nails and Ministry. However, because of their devotion to a very specific moment in time, *Industrial Soundtrack* and *B-Movie*... establish the power of this musical movement as a valid path for expression, one that purges the wreckage of the past to make way for a better future. 📍

## PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

In his first film, Anthony Asquith lampooned the excesses of the film industry – and declared how much he adored it



By Bryony Dixon

Everyone loves a film about filmmaking, and Anthony Asquith's first film, *Shooting Stars* (1928), is one of the best and earliest – a love-letter to the process.

It opens with a great cinematic trick: a girl dressed in a calico frock, with Mary Pickford curls, carrying a white dove in a cage, gazes down at her handsome cowboy from an apple-blossom tree. It's a typical Wild West romance of the type Mr Griffith might have made in another age. Or is it? As our heroine cradles the dove it gives her a vicious peck (animals always know). She lets the dove fly, and the sweet face turns into that of a screeching prima donna as the camera pulls back to reveal the actress balanced precariously on a cardboard crate in her prop tree. The dove flies up into the rafters, showing us we are in a cavernous film studio. We see our cowboy hero climb off his wooden horse and the frustrated director tearing his hair out as the cameraman sends the clapper boy out to show the 'No Good Don't Print' slate for the lab.

It's a classy start, with plenty of novel angles and fluid camera movements drawing us through the studio space. We can take in the unglamorous surroundings, a chaos of dusty scenery, lighting rigs and cables, with the director and crew trying to 'save the lights', wrangle the dove and handle the talent all at once. As the scene continues, the camera follows the actors from a high angle (the screenplay is precise: "Very Long Shot of Studio from the Roof," it says. "N.B. This scene is designed for the Cricklewood Studio"). We see them weave their way through the studio, past another set, where a Chaplinesque slapstick comedy is being shot. As they stop to watch we see a small jazz band playing – a common practice in silent days to create much-needed instant atmosphere for the actors. It's a rare, lovely detail: it tells us that using music must have been worth the considerable cost of employing professional musicians for this purpose.

A commentary on the superficiality of the studio system, *Shooting Stars* is also, uniquely in British film, full of glorious detail of the work of a film studio in the 1920s. Despite his privileged background – a prime minister's son – Asquith was never happier than in the company of the studio technicians and crew. The space of the fictional studio is authentic – as the script reveals, it was shot at Cricklewood in north-west London, a former aircraft factory covering more than 20,000 square feet, in which five productions could be filming at once. It had its own power plant, printing and developing labs, rooms for scene painting, editing, scenario work and

*'Shooting Stars' was a young man's film, intended to create a stir*



Annette Benson in *Shooting Stars*

financial planning, scenery lofts, dressing rooms, carpenters' workshops, props departments and, of course, the canteen. The film shows many of these functions and departments. We also see a celebrity interview by a gushing agent of the fan press, a location shoot for the comedy on a freezing beach in Norfolk, some stunt work, a trip to the cinema, and the studio canteen, full of waiting extras leafing through *Picturegoer* and hoping to be called for a day's work.

*Shooting Stars* was an audacious debut for Asquith – as Luke McKernan has put it, it was "a young man's film", intended to create a stir, a tactic followed by later prodigies such as Welles and Tarantino. Lampooning the film world was a risky strategy, a bit of barefaced cheek unlikely to ingratiate him to the industry or the fans who, the film implies, lap up the studio system's shallow genre product. But Asquith was the perfect person to comment on the business of filmmaking. He had visited Hollywood and watched Chaplin at work; in Germany he had seen the latest developments in lighting and set design; and he watched the latest art films at the Film Society. Like Hitchcock he saw that the British film industry needed to up its game; and he was lucky to arrive at British Instructional Films, which made *Shooting Stars*, as they decided to go into feature production, with financial confidence boosted by the Quota Act, which forced cinemas to show a quota of British films. Asquith's commitment to improving the British industry was clear from the start. Filmmaking was becoming ever more expensive and complicated. As the film historian Rachael Low says, by the late 1920s it was hard to locate "the dominant creative influence"; but despite not even 'directing' *Shooting Stars* (it was given to A.V. Bramble to supervise), Asquith had the personality, drive and imagination to break through the deadening influence of entrenched filmmaking practice. 📍

**i** *Shooting Stars* is the BFI/LFF Archive gala screening on 16 October at the Odeon Leicester Square, London



# MAN ON FIRE

The banal-sounding premises and mysterious motivations of Andrew Kötting's films contain a world of beauty and genius

**By Stewart Lee**

I met my future favourite British filmmaker without knowing it, albeit only for a few moments, years before I became familiar with his work. In an Edinburgh bar in 1991, I briefly complimented an enigmatic stranger on his stylish Petula Clark T-shirt. Andrew Kötting recently informed me the Petula Clark T-shirt man was him. This, remember, was back in the days before hipsters had archly re-contextualised such icons on their expensively screenprinted garments. Even then, in his shirts if nothing else, Kötting was out on his own.

Andrew Kötting is 55 years old. He has been making films for a long time. But are his films, which may exist alongside attendant installations or records or sculptures or books, even films at all? Or are they by-products, documenting other processes, their purpose known only to the artist himself?

It was the comedian Simon Munnery, in many ways a Kötting-esque outsider, who first told me about Andrew Kötting, after being cast in Kötting's 1993 short *Smart Alek*. Simon's previous recommendations of great artists I had been ignorant of were Miles Davis and Bob Dylan. He had form.

So I decided to watch *Gallivant* (1996), rented on DVD from a now-closed Stoke Newington art-film rental shop, with no expectations, gloriously unaware of who Kötting was. But my whole understanding of what film could be, and of what any artistic process could encompass, was about to change for ever.

To me, *Gallivant* seemed immediately one of the greatest things any human had ever made. But its premise is simple. Kötting and his camera accompany his grandmother Gladys and his eight-year-old daughter Eden, who has the genetic brain disorder Joubert syndrome, in a travelogue around the coast of Britain, seeing the sights, sampling quirky customs and interviewing eccentric locals. It doesn't sound like much.

So why is *Gallivant* so beautiful, so impossibly moving, especially when Kötting, as the film's press release noted, was "ever-conscious of avoiding sentimental devices, and ruthless in editing scenes which were



*Gallivant* (1996)



Out on his own: Andrew Kötting

perhaps too intimate and too touching"?

As in all Kötting's films, blurred images overlap. Filmstock and film quality change intermittently. Conventional narrative seems absent. Landscape takes on a life of its own. Location sound is routinely sacrificed for impressionistic collages of found noise, music and dialogue, or for audio clearly taken from other scenes in the film. And all this works in dramatic opposition to the images it accompanies, unlike the glibly supportive tonal tuneage that accompanies most cinematic efforts.

The people on screen in a Kötting film appear to be involved in some important work – a comical river trip to the Olympic site in a swan-shaped pedalo in 2012 in *Swandown* (in which I have a five-minute cameo); the renovation of a ruined Pyrenean house in *Louyre: This Our Still Life* (2011); or a dressing-up box re-enactment of a dead poet's life in his most recent work, *By Our Selves*. But it is rarely clear what their motivations for undertaking these tasks are, or even if those involved share a common purpose.

The crew are in shot. The director appears, controlling the action, participating in the events. There is no effort to hide the mechanics of the process. And yet this honesty makes the finished products even




*By Our Selves* (2015)

*To me, 'Gallivant' seemed immediately one of the greatest things any human had ever made*

more magical. As pretence is stripped away, ideas and feelings are foregrounded.

It is not always obvious why the events Kötting records have taken place. Were they staged by actors for the benefit of the camera, as if they were a kind of drama, as in most conventional films? (Kötting's 2001 *This Filthy Earth*, for example, at least began life as a version of Zola's *La Terre*.) Or would the events depicted have happened anyway, the presence of the camera being incidental, as in a documentary?

Kötting's latest release combines all the strands of his previous work. *By Our Selves* is, simultaneously, a lo-fi historical drama recreating incidents in the life of the 19th-century poet John Clare; a human-interest meeting between a father (Freddie Jones) and a son (Toby Jones), who have both played Clare at different points in their careers, Jones senior for the BBC in 1970; a document of a group of disparate artists and writers and others making a journey across southern England in Clare's footsteps; a meditation on the English landscape, complete with mythical acid-folk spirit guides; and an examination of the process of filming all the above.

I saw *By Our Selves* at a screening in Hackney earlier this year. I envy you, reader, in that you still have the pleasure of seeing it, and perhaps *Gallivant*, *This Our Still Life* and *Swandown* too, for the first time. We spend a lot of time peering over our shoulders at the artists we've lost, forgetting that, if we look for them, some of the greatest are among us now. 

 ***By Our Selves* is on limited release now and is reviewed on page 62**



# EASTERN APPROACHES

Facing official disapproval at home, the Beijing Independent Film Festival is flourishing in a new guise in New York

**By Sukhdev Sandhu**

Film festivals, like people, can be silenced. They can become refugees and be forced into exile. That's been the fate of the Beijing Independent Film Festival which, since it began in 2004, had been a vital showpiece for Chinese directors eager to share their work with audiences, journalists and distributors. Some hoped to become the new Wang Bing, Zhao Liang or Jia Zhangke; others planned to talk with fellow filmmakers, to exchange stories and ideas, to build networks that might help them circulate their work both at home and abroad.

It's small wonder that the authorities, mercurial at the best of times, were nervous about the festival, constantly forcing it to improvise and find new venues at the last moment. In 2013 there was a mysterious and still unexplained power cut during the opening film. Last year, after organisers came prepared with an extra generator and spare torches, the police cracked down more heavily: attendees, who had to be approved, were told they could only watch the films on DVD, in their own time, and in groups of between two and five. Thugs – presumably hired – intimidated the audiences. Organisers were detained. Worst of all, local officials descended on the festival's headquarters in Songzhuang, an artist's village 40 kilometres outside the capital, and confiscated an archive of more than 1,500 films.

This could have been the end of the story had it not been for the trio of Karin Chien, an independent film producer who co-founded dGenerate Films, a key distributor of Chinese independent films; writer and film curator Shelly Kraicer; and J.P. Sniadecki, an American-born

alumnus of Harvard's Sensory Ethnography Lab and director of a number of China-located documentaries, such as *The Iron Ministry*. Helped by a Kickstarter campaign, they put together Cinema on the Edge: The Best of the Beijing Independent Film Festival 2012-2014, a month-long programme they brought to a number of screening venues in New York. This coalition of the willing – among them Jonas Mekas's Anthology Film Archives, the Maysles Cinema in Harlem and the Museum of Chinese in America – became a kind of collective shelter for the festival, a temporary home for the homeless.

There was a danger that Cinema on the Edge's backstory might overshadow the films it has gone to such great lengths to showcase. Fortunately, it's a highly impressive selection, bringing together lesser-known titles with others such as Huang Ji's *Egg and Stone* (winner of the 2012 Rotterdam Tiger Award) that have already been picking up plaudits on the international festival circuit.

Wang Xiaozhen's *Around That Winter* (2013) took a familiar subject – the gulf between city and rural life – and from it fashioned a mordant and strikingly photographed comedy. A young professional brings his girlfriend to meet his farmer parents in Shandong. There, it's grey and cold, children sweat like troopers, and the pipes are always freezing. There's a lot of semi-awkward sex, and an extraordinary number of peeing scenes. Nothing much happens, but some Roy Andersson-style framing and the control with which the mood of imminent social disaster is maintained make this a strangely insinuating debut.

Equally arresting was *Female Directors* (2012),

*The directors of 'Yumen' are at pains to ensure that a lot of the time it's unclear not only what is being shown but why*

from Yang Mingming: she and Guo Yue play a pair of twentysomething graduates eager to get ahead in the film business. They decide to chronicle their lives, and are constantly taking turns to get behind their shared camera. They're also sleeping with the same man (nicknamed 'Mr Short'). In its casual disregard for the boundary between documentary and fiction, its buoyant and sexually frank portrait of young women in the modern city, and its use of plangent Michael Nyman-esque music, the film bears a happy likeness to some of the work of Michael Winterbottom.

A number of films in the festival dealt with submerged histories. Hu Jie's *Spark* (2014) was a riveting portrait of an underground magazine, called *Spark*, set up in 1960 to detail the human cost of the famine triggered by Mao's Great Leap Forward. The famine was also the starting point of Zou Xueping's *Satiated Village* (2011): for her previous documentary, the director had collected first-hand testimonies about the famine from old-timers in her home village; in this one, she screened that film to them and recorded their responses – which range from gratitude to fear that she'll show it abroad where it will make China look bad.

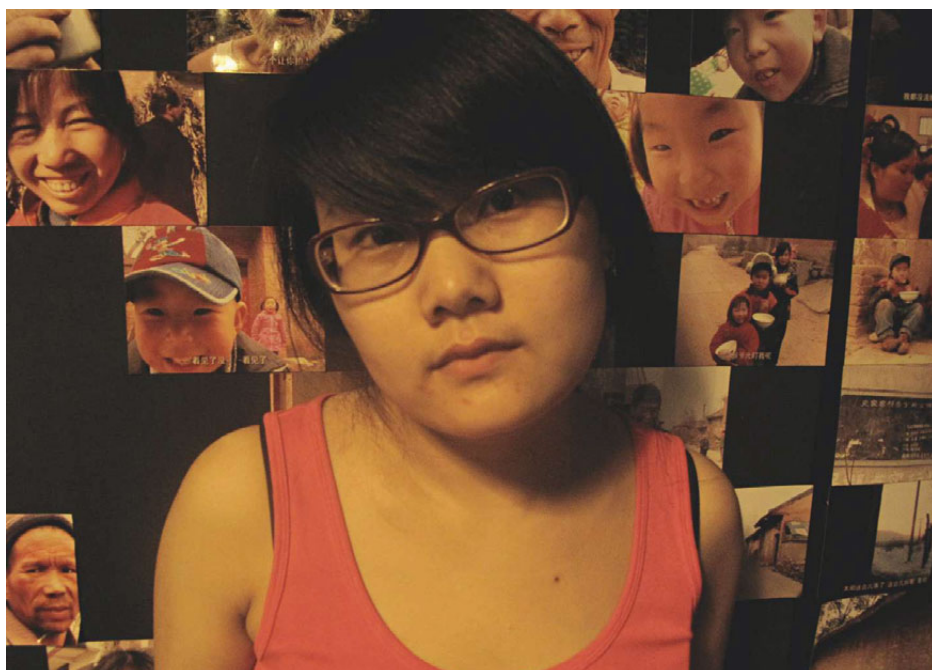
Best of all was *Yumen* (2013) by Huang Xiang, Xu Ruotao and J.P. Sniadecki, a lysergic city threnody in which the camera roams across an abandoned drilling town, interweaving ambience-heavy archival footage with performance-art routines set in contemporary rubblescapes and fragmented voices talking about the past in terms of ghosts. There's a hauntological feeling, the 'ruin-porn' aesthetic accentuated by gorgeously saturated colours and sweet Taiwanese pop songs from the 1970s. The directors are at pains to ensure that a lot of the time it's unclear not only what is being shown but why. Such ambiguities, to which China's censorious bureaucrats are understandably allergic, are precisely what make this film – along with many others at Cinema on the Edge – so compelling. 6



Mordant comedy: *Around That Winter* (2013)



Lysergic threnody: *Yumen* (2013)



Submerged history: *Satiated Village* (2011)





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**"With its Keystone cops, oddball locals and gruesome grotesquery, *P'tit Quinquin* is funny alright – but also deeply unnerving"**  
*Anton Bitel, Little White Lies*

**"Not only has Dumont made a comedy, it's also genuinely funny and surprisingly knockabout – while still unmistakably the work of an artist who mines his background for images of humanity's savage side."**  
*Jonathan Romney, The Guardian*

## West

Christian Schwochow

Nelly, a young mother with a child, leaves East Germany for a new beginning in the West. But she discovers she has to undergo more interrogations by the Allies suspicious that she may be working for the Stasi. The Refugee Centre turns into a cold war location, where friends could actually be informants. Jödis Triebel gives an outstanding performance, that won her the best German actress of the year award.

● Available now on DVD and download



★★★★★

**"Triebel is excellent...a magnetic presence"**  
*Wendy Ide, The Times*

**"Taut cold-war drama...resting on Triebel's finely nuanced performance...a counterpoint to *The Lives of Others*, and intriguing on personal and geopolitical levels."**  
*Mark Kermode, The Observer*

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# Reviews



## 83 **The Martian**

*A spiritual sequel to 'Saving Private Ryan', Ridley Scott's film is successful in so far as Matt Damon gives precisely the sort of strong, persuasive performance needed to magnetise what is at heart a solo survival drama*



**62 Films of the Month**



**70 Films**



**96 Home Cinema**



**104 Books**





Queer as folk: Iain Sinclair (in goat mask), Andrew Kötting (as straw bear) and Toby Jones in Kötting's film

## By Our Selves

United Kingdom 2015  
Director: Andrew Kötting  
Certificate 15 83m 26s

See tribute  
on page 58

### Reviewed by David Jays

In Andrew Kötting's melancholy, maverick film, a female voiceover from a 1970 BBC programme announces, crisply, "John Clare was a minor nature poet who went mad." Clare studies have moved on considerably since then, with several biographies and editions of his work – which was first acclaimed and then relatively dismissed during his lifetime (1793-1864). He was a consummate outsider in the Romantic age – a working-class rural poet with a history of mental illness. A central event in his biography was his escape from an Essex asylum and four-day walk to Northamptonshire in search of his first great love, Mary. He also haunts the work of writer Iain Sinclair, who retraced Clare's journey in his 2005 book *Edge of the Orison*, and does so again in Kötting's film.

Kötting's first full-length documentary, *Gallivant* (1996), travelled around the British coast, while his most recent, *Swandown* (2012), was also a collaboration with Sinclair. In *By Our Selves*, he imposes an early Victorian route on a largely transformed modern landscape. The project may seem kin to Patrick Keiller's sombre eulogies for a disappearing world

(*London*, *Robinson in Space*), though Kötting's films are wilder and more questing.

Clare's account of his asylum escape in *Journey out of Essex* doesn't romanticise this episode in his life: his feet were hobbled by the pace, he slept outdoors and ate grass by the roadside. *By Our Selves* shares his stubborn independence, which extends to the film's funding – more than £20,000 was raised via a Kickstarter campaign – and to the determinedly lo-fi presentation. The title text is a scrawl, the camera wobbles alongside Toby Jones's feet as he follows Clare's route – a wavering lens for the poet's wandering wits; a full-bearded soundman is often seen pacing beside Jones with his mop-head microphone.

Yet this is also a film of poised intent, shot in richly textured greyscale, often with exquisite detail: the dappled light, scrub and splinter on the forest floor; a wrinkled hand on dry bark. There are also quixotic touches, such as Jones's image imposed on a medieval mural in Waltham Abbey, followed by a snatch of *Evita*'s "Don't Cry for Me Argentina".

Some commentators paint Clare's plight as an index of change – a peasant poet protesting at and then maddened by agricultural exploitation. Kötting finds that the modern landscape is even more thoroughly policed, with security cameras clamped on the trees. Hedges have become pylons, lanes roundabouts; wayside inns give way to branches of Topshop; birdsong fades in the subdued whomp of a wind turbine. The poet records fractious encounters with villagers on carts, but Jones stands in a field as

lorries thunder past, words drowned out by the cacophony beside a speed camera. When we hear one of Clare's most resonant lines, "I long for scenes where man hath never trod," those scenes seem further away than ever.

I could watch Jones for hours: the baby-bird scruff of hair, his face like a paranoid turnip. He has a fascinating presence, all crumple. He has also played a surprising number of celebrated artists in extremity, working out their obsessions, whether Truman Capote in the film *Infamous*, Hitchcock (*The Girl*) and Hogarth (*A Harlot's Progress*) on television, or J.M.W. Turner in *The Painter* on stage. In patched jacket, scuffed shoes, with a handkerchief knotted around his neck, is he portraying Clare, or following in his footsteps (a querulous villager on a mobility scooter scoffs, "That's not John Clare!")?

Jones remains silent in the film: appropriately, for a project about tottering in the footsteps of forebears, Clare's words are read by Jones's own father – the rubicund actor Freddie Jones, who himself played Clare in a 1970 episode of the BBC arts series *Omnibus* (glimpsed briefly here). Jones *père*'s accordion-creased tones are

*I could watch Toby Jones for hours: the baby-bird scruff of hair, his face like a paranoid turnip. He has a fascinating presence, all crumple*





**On the road:** Kötting's film retraces the route taken by poet John Clare in 1841 after he left his Epping Forest asylum to walk to Northamptonshire

especially poignant, and Kötting retains his occasional vocal stumble. We see the actor close his eyes to recall Clare's most forlorn poem, which begins, "I am – yet what I am none cares or knows," adding, "I remember it in solitude."

Sinclair walks out of curiosity, out of mischief, sometimes out of rage. In his books and journalism, his scepticism at the commodified landscape of south-east England can read like scorn – at history erased, but also at the little lives in neat homes in placid commuter belts. His oppositional voice can enliven but also alienate; especially when, as here, it seems to occupy a very male world (though his wife Anna is his walking companion in *Edge of the Orison*). The women in *By Our Selves* are marginal figures – the haunting Mary (the musician MacGillivray), singing and wafting her black shawl, and Kötting's daughter Eden, shown in the grainy colour stock of home movies.

The journey is periodically accompanied by folk-revival performers, self-conscious revenants from a lost age. Musicians in ribbons and animal masks hop along the roadside (they later bundle Jones into the back of their transit van, just as Clare's family recaptured him); a 'straw bear' – a man encased in straw, an old Fenland custom to mark the start of the agricultural year – also tags along. (Kötting himself is inside the straw, according to the publicity notes.)

Sinclair takes to the road too, often wearing an uncanny white-goat mask. He doesn't offer much context for Clare's journey except in two extended fixed-camera interviews. He first meets the writer

Alan Moore, who wrote about the journey out of Essex in Clare's persona in the novel *Voice of the Fire*. A raffish, occult figure – wizard beard, multiple rings, stick – Moore describes the Northamptonshire flatlands as a "vision sump", a place of "delusion and poetry". He namechecks John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the Lollards, Dusty Springfield and a cult of true believers awaiting Jesus in a house outside Bedford. He's amiably scathing about Northampton, where he himself was born and where Clare spent almost the last 23 years of his life. "It's difficult to get up the escape velocity," he says. "Nobody ever gets out unless they're sucked back in."

Clare was an outsider – not necessarily through choice, but through vocation, sexuality, mental health. Kötting and Sinclair bear down on this to make him an oppositional figure, having Jones tap determinedly on a typewriter at the edge of a lake, or glare at the camera until it backs off. There's a wilful eccentricity to all this, especially when Sinclair (still in his goat mask) interviews Simon Kövesi, of Oxford Brookes University, who is dressed as a boxer in homage to Clare's own passion for prizefighting. Kötting's pilgrim's progress is most compelling when letting us inhabit Clare's own disorientation, a prism for a lost soul in a constrained world. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Film

Andrew Kötting  
This project would not have been possible without Iain Sinclair and his book *Edge of the Orison*  
**Producer**  
Andrew Kötting  
Edward Fletcher

#### Director of Photography

Nick Gordon Smith  
**Edit**  
Andrew Kötting  
Cliff West  
**Music**  
Jem Finer  
**Director of Sound**  
Philippe Clompi

#### Production Companies

University for the Creative Arts  
Lottery Funded -  
Supported using public funding by Arts Council England  
Soda Pictures  
**Executive Producer**  
Gareth Evans

#### With

Iain Sinclair  
goat impersonator/  
Ermine Street  
irregular  
Toby Jones  
younger John Clare  
Freddie Jones  
older John Clare  
Eden Kötting

#### Dorothy

Alan Moore  
Simon Kövesi  
themselves  
MacGillivray  
Mary Joyce  
David Aylward  
driver, drummer  
The Straw Bear  
[i.e. Andrew Kötting]  
straw bear

#### In Black & White and Colour [1.78:1]

**Distributor**  
Soda Pictures

**In 1841, the poet John Clare left the asylum in Epping Forest where he lived, to walk 80 miles into Northamptonshire. He hoped to be reunited with Mary, his first love, who had in fact died some years before. Clare's walk took four days; soon after, his family delivered him to an asylum in Northampton, where he lived for the rest of his life.**

**The filmmaker Andrew Kötting and writer Iain**

**Sinclair trace Clare's route. The poet is embodied by the actor Toby Jones, whose father Freddie reads from Clare's account of the journey and from his poems. Mary is also glimpsed, as is the Straw Bear, a figure from English folk festivals. Meanwhile Sinclair interviews the writer and graphic novelist Alan Moore and the academic Simon Kövesi, both devotees of Clare's work.**





**Dead man's shoes:** Ariane Labed plays Alice, a cargo ship engineer who has been hired to replace a sailor who has died under mysterious circumstances

## Fidelio Alice's Journey

France 2014

Director: Lucie Borleteau

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

"I'm replacing someone," Alice (Ariane Labed) tells her lover Félix (Anders Danielsen Lie) as she prepares to take on a last-minute commission as second engineer on the cargo ship *Fidelio*. Despite Alice's breezy tone, the notion of replacement goes on to carry considerable weight in Lucie Borleteau's complex and accomplished debut feature. *Fidelio* turns out to be the new name for the same old ship on which Alice served her cadetship – and a harbinger of the test her own fidelity will face from the presence of Gaël (Melvin Poupaud), the captain with whom she had an affair back then. Alice becomes quickly preoccupied not only with Gaël, but with the deceased sailor whose job she has stepped into. The all-male, multinational crew she works with, meanwhile, is conspicuously concerned with professional displacement – by female mechanics such as Alice, which is unusual, and by low-paid, stateless migrants, which is less so. And night after night, the stable relationships they have left behind on land are replaced by fleeting physical encounters.

Like *The Master* (2012), with which it shares the motif of churned-up water foaming in a vessel's wake, *Fidelio* presents the ocean as a milieu in which certain social rules are suspended, while other guidelines, customs

and hierarchies are intensified. Rather than putting aside or disguising her femininity in order to fit in with the aggressively macho onboard environment, Alice seems to thrive within it. She actively enjoys the drinking, smoking and sexual boasting – "I've fucked on all five continents," she tells a table of colleagues – and accepts, with a sphinx-like smile of semi-approval, being confronted with intimate snapshots or details of grisly sexual dares. Yet she is compelled to set her own boundary and endanger her position

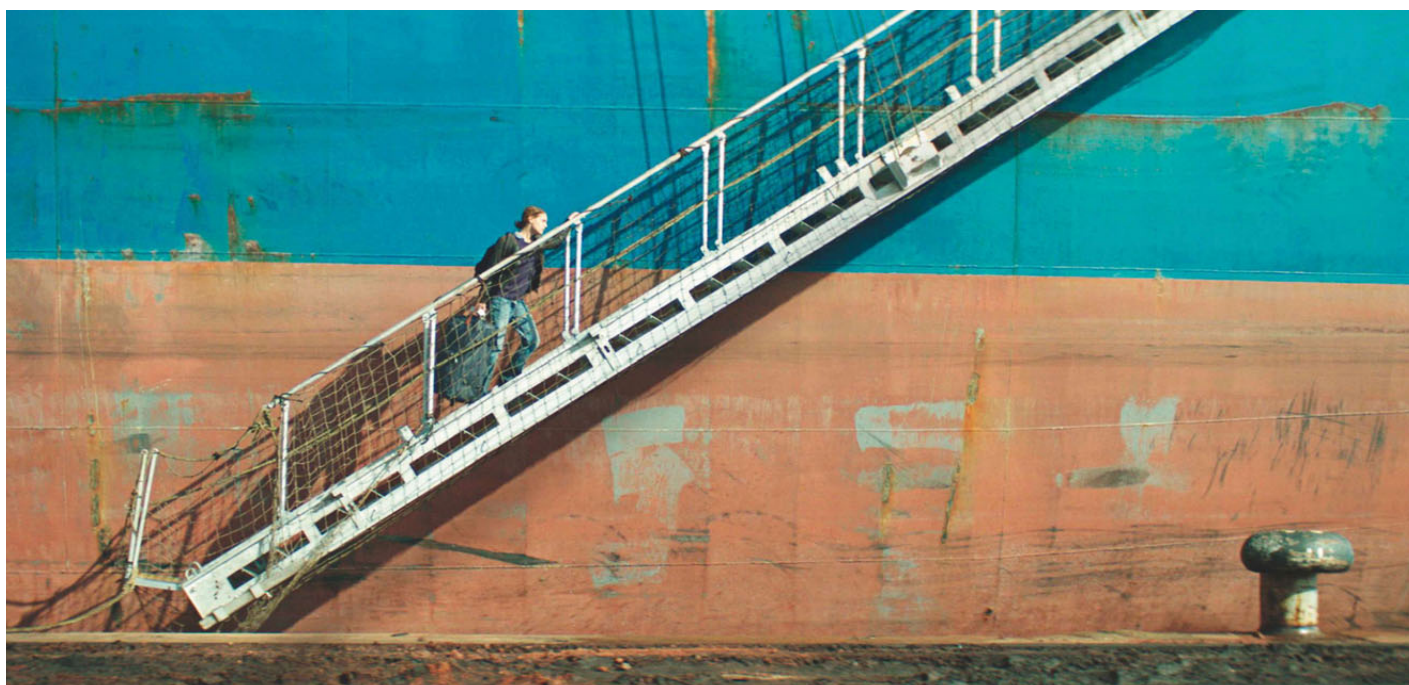
as one of the boys when an obnoxious crewmate, Frédéric, assaults her in her cabin.

The encounter with Frédéric looks briefly as if it might define Alice's direction and that of the film: a tomboy turns feminist avenger and risks her job, an unabashed good-time girl stands up for her right not to be treated as sexual fair game. But while it touches on those points, Borleteau's story (co-scripted with Clara Bourreau) proves less straightforward in its intentions. Alice keeps her rage and tears private in the aftermath of Frédéric's transgression, and weathers the



**In between the sheets:** Alice with ship's captain Gaël, played by Melvil Poupaud





When the ship comes in: for Alice and the crew, whatever happens at sea stays at sea, but her actions soon catch up with her when she's back on dry land

gossip without comment when Gaël promotes her in Frédéric's stead. Of more interest to her is the matter of what really happened to her predecessor Patrick and the increasing choppiness of her own emotional waters. At home, she is anchored by Félix, with whom she is in the happy first throes of love; but just as the ships on which she works alter their direction depending on changes in weather and markets, so Alice becomes wayward on the water. What happens at sea stays at sea, she and her shipmates tell each other; but intimate smartphone photographs respect no such boundaries, and Alice's slapdash approach to covering her tracks soon catches up with her. Gaël, meanwhile, imperils her system of compartmentalisation by threatening to become emotionally available to her. In a scene that's neatly ironic but still persuasive, Alice is distraught to learn that he is not happily married,

as she had believed, but in the midst of a divorce.

To some viewers, Alice will seem at best an improbable creation and at worst a traitor to the feminist cause: a facilitator of male fantasies and misdeeds; no friend to other women. And few will be able to defend her against the charge of self-involvement, particularly when she discards her interest in what really happened to Patrick in favour of regarding his diary as a map through her own minor emotional quandaries. However one reads its protagonist's particular *'Fidelio' stands out among films about sex and gender by virtue of presenting Alice's sex life as her own business, and not a response to the desires of men*

behaviour, however, *Fidelio* stands out among films about sex and gender by virtue of presenting Alice's sex life as her own business, and not a response to the desires of the men around her.

At both extremes of the gender debate there exists a tendency to characterise heterosexual sex as a male preoccupation in which the female participant is at best passive, if not abused or enslaved. Outside of the HBO television series *Sex and the City* (with which this has the odd unexpected resonance, thanks not only to the theme of being torn between a devoted new lover and an irresistible ex, but also to Labeled's resemblance to Sarah Jessica Parker), it's hard to come up with many recent works in which a woman struggles with monogamy not because she's chronically messed up or self-hating, but just because she likes sex and can't decide.

Narratively, Borleteau's film is pleasingly ambiguous without being difficult or abstruse. Rather than a linear narrative, it presents a wealth of intriguing incidents and atmospheres, loosely linked together by Alice's experiences. Both the physical environment of the boat and the interaction of the men on board are portrayed in a manner at once straightforward and poetic, calling to mind another female director's film about work, jealousy and male company: Claire Denis's *Beau travail* (1999). The onslaught of frightening accidents that accompanies Alice's growing romantic confusion hints at supernatural forces, or an *Alien*-style infestation. But these incidents also simply serve to illustrate the hazardous nature of the sailors' work, and the slapdash safety measures taken by their employers. As they treat the *Fidelio*, so Alice treats her relationship, and a degree of risk is inevitable in both cases.

If the film finally supplies less dramatic payoff than early scenes seemed to promise, with many narrative threads allowed to drift away unresolved, this in itself expresses something essential about the character at its centre. Whether it makes her self-protective or self-destructive, a feminist or a femme fatale, Alice is finally less affected by other people than she likes to think: her primary fidelity is to herself. **S**

## Credits and Synopsis

### Produced by

Marine Arrighi  
de Casanova  
Pascal Caucheteux

### Screenplay

Lucie Borleteau  
Clara Bourreau

with the collaboration  
of Mathilde Boisseleau

### Director of

Photography

Simon Beaufils

### Editor

Guy Lecomte

### Art Direction

Sidney Dubois

### Music

Thomas De Pourquerey

### Sound

Marie-Clotilde Chéry

### Costumes

Sophie Bégon

### Production Companies

@Why Not  
Productions,  
Apsara Films, ARTE  
France Cinéma  
Production  
Companies  
Apsara Films and  
Why Not Productions  
present a co-

production of Why  
Not Productions,  
Apsara Films, ARTE  
France Cinéma  
With the participation  
of ARTE France,  
Canal +, Centre  
national du cinéma,  
Région Provence  
Alpes Côte d'Azur  
A film by Lucie  
Borleteau  
In partnership with  
Centre National  
du Cinéma et de  
l'Image Animée

### Executive Producer

Isabelle Tillou  
Film Extracts  
Kaboom (2010)

### Cast

Ariane Labeled  
Alice Lesage  
Melvil Poupaud  
Gaël Lévassieur  
Anders Danielsen Lie  
Félix Bjørnsen  
Pascal Tagnati  
Antoine  
Jean Louis Coullac'h

Barbereau  
Nathanaël Maini  
Frédéric, Fred  
Bogdan Zamfir  
Vali  
Manuel Ramirez  
Felizardo  
Ireneo San Andres  
Flores  
Marc-Antoine  
Vaugeois  
Sébastien, 'Seb'

In Colour  
[2.35:1]  
Subtitles

### Distributor

New Wave Films

French theatrical title  
*Fidelio L'Odysée  
d'Alice*

France, the present. Just before her 30th birthday, naval engineer Alice leaves her artist boyfriend Félix at home to take up a job on the same cargo ship on which she trained, replacing a sailor who has suddenly died under mysterious circumstances. The ship's captain, Gaël, who was Alice's lover when she was a cadet, instantly pays her special attention. In her cabin, Alice finds the diary of the dead man, Patrick, in which he details his confused romantic life and the risky state of his health. After a drunken evening, a crewmate, Frédéric, assaults Alice, and she threatens to have him fired. After she resumes her affair with Gaël, Alice is promoted to first engineer for another voyage, and Frédéric is let go.

During a period of shore leave, Alice sees Félix and her family. She gives Patrick's diary to Félix to read. Gaël sends her an intimate photograph, which Félix finds. Alice returns to the ship to find Patrick's sister on board, asking questions about his death, which Gaël deflects. Now yearning for Félix, Alice resists Gaël's advances – but sleeps with Vali, the ship's young cadet. Successive technical issues on board culminate in a fire, in which Gaël is badly injured. While the boat is docked in Gdansk, Félix comes to see Alice, and reveals that he too has slept with somebody else. Alice retrieves Patrick's diary and returns it to his family. Her situation with Félix unresolved, Alice begins a flirtation with another sailor.



Dear Max,  
What does a diplomat  
for a country that isn't recognized  
do when he comes to the office  
in the morning?

Eric



Question time: the film follows the epistolary exchanges between filmmaker Eric Baudelaire and Maxim Gvinjia, a one-time minister in Abkhazia

## Letters to Max

France/Norway/Belgium/USA 2014  
Director: Eric Baudelaire

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The foundation on which *Letters to Max* is constructed is an epistolary exchange between filmmaker Eric Baudelaire and Maxim Gvinjia, a diplomat and one-time minister of foreign affairs in Abkhazia. The two men met during Baudelaire's visit to Abkhazia's capital city Sukhumi in 2000 and struck up a friendship, which they kept up through the subsequent years. Maxim – 'Max' for short – reads aloud from Baudelaire's letters, which are loaded with open-ended questions, and then offers his answers, his voice the film's principal narration. The accompanying visuals, images taken all around Abkhazia, combine with Max's words to create a portrait of both the man and the nation he represents, though its very claim to be a nation remains disputed.

A typical missive from Baudelaire might ask, "What does a diplomat for a country that isn't recognised do when he comes to the office in the morning?" (The liminal status of Abkhazia is a through-line in his back-and-forth with

Max.) The images connect to the matters being discussed sometimes directly, sometimes obliquely – but a shot of a stalled gondola lift dangling between two towers at some long-shuttered industrial concern can easily be taken as a visual metaphor for Abkhazia's neither-nor status, as well as one more piece of evidence that the country has never recovered from its 1992-93 war. (The film's opening images are of the rainy countryside, where shells of dead tanks are in the process of being reclaimed by overgrowth.)

Abkhazia, which claims for itself a population of around a quarter of a million and an area about the size of Cyprus, is located on the eastern coast of the Black Sea. It declared its independence from Georgia after the war, though most of the world's nations have never acknowledged it, and at the time of filming it had only secured eight of the 97 votes required to be recognised as a member nation by the UN. Because *Letters to Max* isn't an info-dump doc, so much of this is alluded to or comes out in the natural course of conversation rather than being stated outright.

Baudelaire's motive for choosing Max as his co-author is immediately obvious, for the answers he offers to each question are thoughtful and unexpected, touching on matters both practical and abstract. The first response that we hear from Max is in answer to Baudelaire's

opener: "Are you there?" "The question... it's very philosophical," Max replies. "I don't live in the space where I'm actually physically living. I'm always somewhere in my thoughts."

This is not to say that the collaboration is entirely eye to eye; at various points Baudelaire presses Max with questions about Abkhazia's dependent relationship with its ally, Russia, as well as about the mass exile of Georgians from Abkhazia in the years following the war. The movie abounds in images of abandoned homes, some of which, it is suggested, belonged to fleeing Georgians. There are also gutted holiday villas and Soviet-style poured-concrete brutalist blocks of flats mortally wounded by artillery and run to seed, too big to fix up and too big to knock down.

While Max discusses the history of Abkhazia, Baudelaire shows the physical evidence of that history as it can still be found today, more than a quarter of a century after the collapse of the USSR: a mosaic depicting a rocket launch, for instance, recalls Abkhazia's connection to the Soviet space programme. Recounting his shifting impressions on repeated visits to Abkhazia, Baudelaire writes, "The ruins had become monuments. Monuments to another logic of time, another logic of space, another logic of politics – the politics of isolation, and the politics of non-recognition."

Baudelaire's compositional sense and historical





*In looking at the identity of a nation-that-isn't-a-nation, Baudelaire and his collaborator take the opportunity to touch on larger philosophical questions*

perspective elevate this above mere 'ruin porn', and he's after something more besides. The past infringes on the present in Abkhazia, but so too does the promise of a glorious tomorrow – souvenir T-shirts bearing the flag are emblazoned with the motto 'Abkhazia Country of the Future'. In looking at the identity of a nation-that-isn't-a-nation, Baudelaire and his collaborator take the opportunity to touch on larger philosophical questions. The disjuncture expressed in Max's response to the question "Are you there?" is at the heart of *Letters to Max's* design; as Baudelaire has stated in interview, this is "a film that's based on asynchronism". In his voiceover, Max alludes to 12 years having passed between his meeting Baudelaire and the beginning of their correspondence, and while they speak of anticipating a future reunion and plan the film they will make together, the accompanying images reveal that of course this reunion has already taken place, the distance has been breached and the film has been shot. ("Our correspondence is more like recalling the past and talking from the present," Max says, "but you didn't listen yet to it. Possibly you'll come and see something else.") Further complicating the timeline of the film, Baudelaire and Max attempt to 'replay' certain key scenes in Max's life, such as 26 August 2008, when Russian president Dmitry Medvedev announced that the Russian Federation was going to recognise the independence of Abkhazia, or the day when Max received word of his nomination for the post of minister of foreign affairs.

Running through all this is the question of what, precisely, makes a country. "It's possible," writes Baudelaire, "that nations are based as much on what the people jointly forget as what they remember." That forgetting is the helpmate of sentiment. Max, for his part, confesses to a "great nostalgia about the Soviet Union", while expressing doubt about Georgians who might like to return to ancestral homes in Abkhazia, stating that they "want to return to their nostalgia, they want to return to a past that isn't there any more". And despite Max's repeatedly stated optimism, a general sense of the good times being gone, in more ways than one, lends the movie a pervasive melancholy. Once a political prodigy, Max is now out of office and nearing 40, the boyishness of his soft face betrayed by his receding hairline and wistfully preoccupied expression. He has three sons but, he tells Baudelaire, lives apart from their mother

and shares custody of them. Then again, as Max is reporting his estrangement from his wife, we see the family together at an outing on the beach – have they reconciled since those words were spoken? It is in moments such as this, or in Max's telling Baudelaire that it's a "sunny September day" while rainfall is audible on the soundtrack, that Baudelaire teases out 'asynchronism'.

*Letters to Max* is the fourth feature-length work by the 42-year-old Baudelaire, who was born in Salt Lake City but is now based in Paris; he is international in his concerns, which he has pursued consistently and resourcefully. His first solo exhibition, 'Imagined States', at Toulouse's Château d'Eau in 2005, comprised pictures taken in Abkhazia. ("How," the catalogue essay asked, "does one photograph the longing for Statehood?") His 2009 short *The Makes* shows the film critic Phillippe Azoury, playing himself, leading an illustrated bullshit discourse on the non-existent Japanese period of Michelangelo Antonioni, a touchstone for anyone who, like Baudelaire, is interested in photographing architecture.

*The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi and 27 Years Without Images* (2011) and *The Ugly One* (2013) were collaborations in a more traditional sense, both made partly in concert with Adachi Masao, a Japanese avant-garde director who abandoned filmmaking to work for the Palestinian cause. *The Anabasis...*, whose title refers to Xenophon's account of the Greek army's homeward journey, is also built from a correspondence: Adachi, now barred from Beirut, remotely instructs Baudelaire on what to film in his former home. For Baudelaire, however, the idea isn't to say, "You can't go home again," but to ask if you were ever there to begin with. [S](#)

#### Credits and Synopsis

##### Photography

Eric Baudelaire

##### Editing

Eric Baudelaire

Laure Vermeersch

##### Sound

Juliette Navis

##### Production Companies

A film by Eric Baudelaire  
Produced with the

participation of  
Région Ile-de-France,  
Bétonsalon - Centre  
d'art et de recherche,  
Bergen Kunsthall,

Argos Center for  
Art and Media,

Image/Mouvement  
- Centre national  
des arts plastiques,  
UC Berkeley Art  
Museum, Pacific  
Film Archive

Produced by  
Poulet-Malassis

##### In Colour

[1.78:1]

##### Subtitles

##### Distributor

Independent  
Cinema Office

A documentary exploring the story of Abkhazia, a disputed breakaway nation still considered by most world governments to be part of Georgia, through an exchange of letters between filmmaker Eric Baudelaire and former minister of foreign affairs Maxim 'Max' Gvinjia. Images of life in Abkhazia are accompanied by Gvinjia reading from and responding to letters from the filmmaker, with whom he struck up a friendship during the latter's visit to Abkhazia in 2000. Gvinjia, who has retired from politics, gives thoughtful answers to Baudelaire's questions, discussing both his personal life and the past and future of his nation, beginning with the 1992-93 war that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union and ending with Abkhazia declaring its independence from Georgia and expelling Georgian residents. Other landmarks discussed include Russian president Dmitry Medvedev's August 2008 announcement that the Russian Federation would recognise the independence of Abkhazia, and the first official overseas visits by the Abkhaz president to Nicaragua and Venezuela. After visits to a Black Sea resort, a sculptor's studio, a puppet theatre and a folk-dance variety show, the film ends with a letter from Baudelaire, wondering if his earlier letters have been received at all.



Instruments of war: Abkhazia's ruined buildings offer evidence of the country's wartime past





Drive, he said: Jafar Panahi and passenger in *Taxi Tehran*

## Taxi Tehran

Iran 2015

Director: Jafar Panahi

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

You could almost construct a mini-history of recent Iranian cinema from people in their cars. Those battered saloons criss-crossing landscapes ravaged and majestic to dreamlike effect in Abbas Kiarostami's *Life, and Nothing More...* (1992) and *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999). The same filmmaker turning four wheels into a space for private revelation and narrative experiment while Mania Akbari negotiates the traffic-choked capital in *10* (2002). The green sports car on the run from the authorities as Rafi Pitts conjures up rare images of social friction in *The Hunter* (2010). Now writer-director Jafar Panahi himself takes to the driver's seat in *Taxi Tehran*, the third feature he's made under semi-clandestine conditions in defiance of the court order banning him from filmmaking for 20 years. As with its evident model *10*, the action here is largely viewed from the perspective of a dash-mounted camera looking in rather than out, discreetly registering the ebb and flow of a cabbie's typical day and allowing Panahi to present an apparent slice of life that becomes a personal rumination on the status of the moving image within the challenging context of Iranian state control.

Broadly, that simultaneity of public and private realms, being out and about in the city (or country) yet still sheltered enough to be able

to speak your mind, is what the setting of the car has afforded all these filmmakers, bringing with it the implication that once you step outside the vehicle you're in an environment where words and behaviour must be kept within strictly defined and policed parameters.

For Panahi in person, of course, that distinction is even sharper, since the creator of a series of astringent celluloid portraits of lives running against the grain – women falling foul of the legal system in *The Circle* (2000), a pizza-delivery man taking to robbery in *Crimson Gold* (2003), a female football fan's attempt to get into a big game in *Offside* (2006) – has been living in the shadow of his 2010 conviction (since upheld by the appeal court) for "colluding with the intention to commit crimes against the country's national security and propaganda against the Islamic Republic". His six-year prison sentence could, in theory, come into effect at any moment, yet in practice it's obvious that restrictions on his movements have been relaxed, even if foreign travel remains out of the question. So where Panahi's previous post-conviction titles *This Is Not a Film* (2011) and *Closed Curtain* (2013) dealt with the very particular conundrum of how he could possibly continue to make films while

*In encompassing direct criticism of the state security apparatus, this is a courageously forthright offering from a director already facing the possibility of jail*

under a filmmaking ban, the focus in *Taxi Tehran* widens considerably as he and his camera make it out of his front door and on to the streets.

Of course, it's a kind of gag – internationally lauded filmmaker reduced to driving a cab – but one intended to draw attention to Panahi's legal plight. Not that everyone recognises him. The first couple of passengers, self-confessed mugger and female teacher, are too busy arguing with each other over the whys and wherefores of hanging under sharia law to pay Panahi much attention. All this unfolds in a lengthy take that has us wondering whether we're seeing documentary observation or the work of adeptly scripted non-professionals. Next up is a vendor of bootleg DVDs, who laughs when he spots the director behind the wheel. As their exchange plays out, the film's position somewhere between fake documentary and canny construct becomes rather more apparent, underlined by seamless cutting between different angles from the dash-cam to follow the conversation and replicate Kiarostami's formal methods in *10*. It's a marvellously deft way of introducing the film's key thematic concern: who sets the boundaries on what we can and can't watch. The vendor declares he's providing a cultural service, yet he's primarily in business because state censorship makes much of his merchandise undistributable through regular channels. Rifling through a deck of knock-off discs is clearly a bittersweet experience for Panahi, since such underground channels put material in circulation even as they deny the artists any financial payback.

Still, in Tehran as in any other modern global



city, the facility for individuals to make, consume and exchange their own moving images is a part of everyday life now. As Panahi drives, we encounter a former neighbour keen to show him footage of a burglary-in-progress he's filmed and stored on a tablet; the DVD seller's smartphone comes in useful when they pick up a man badly injured in a bike accident and the latter's wife insists on grabbing his last will and testament on video (primarily because, in opposition to regular Islamic practice, he wants his wife rather than his brothers to inherit). For the distraught woman who subsequently pesters Panahi in desperation to get hold of the footage, such digital images evidently possess legal validity, possibly even leverage against Islamic traditions and the courts. It's another subtle reminder that technology has created a new battleground within Iranian society – particularly pertinent to Panahi's own plight – where the ability to record real-life images is one thing, but the value of those images is defined by who has ownership of them and what use the owner can make of them.

Without ever seeming like he's ticking off a series of boxes, Panahi keeps chipping away at these issues when he picks up his niece from school; she starts shooting him on her digital camera, explaining that she's collecting footage for a class assignment – though she is under strict instructions from her teacher to avoid “sordid reality” and keep the mood positively on-message, steering clear of anything “undistributable”. Panahi himself knows all about that word, since much of his filmography has been officially suppressed from domestic release. Nevertheless, his film has lessons for the girl, showing her that the world won't necessarily play ball with her teacher's controlling agenda – as we see when a street-kid picks up some cash dropped by a distracted groom during his wedding video and then refuses to give the money back, undistributable be damned.

In the midst of a bustling narrative, though, it's the quietest interlude that proves the most powerful. As his niece calmly watches the world pass by through the passenger window, Panahi lingers on the shot long enough for us to take the point that this curious, intelligent little girl holds her nation's future in her



**Focal opposition:** Panahi's niece, Hana Saeidi, under instructions not to film 'sordid reality'

grasp, if only she can learn to think for herself. Moreover, the film's subsequent interjection from a female lawyer ferociously critical of the regime's insidious tactics for breaking its opponents certainly gives her much to ponder.

A film that is very much about the specifics of Panahi's restricted present also harks back to the remit of the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, the educational organisation that decades ago did so much to foster the burgeoning cinematic creativity of Panahi and Kiarostami. In encompassing such direct criticism of the state security apparatus, this is a courageously forthright offering from a filmmaker already facing the possibility of jail, yet ultimately it's aimed at a younger generation of Iranians. Panahi is addressing those coming of age at a time when ease of access to digital image technology makes it doubly important for them to look beyond the ideological parameters being set out before them, and to grasp the notion that freedom

of conscience and freedom of distribution are inextricably linked. As unassuming as it is inspirational, the film is, however, far from naive about prospects for change. A chastening last-minute reversal indicates that Panahi may be defiant but he's far from complacent. It's the last but by no means the only 'sordid realism' on view in these frames, so best not to expect *Taxi Tehran* in Iranian cinemas any time soon. 'Undistributable' and proud. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Production Company

A film by Jafar Panahi

#### In Colour [1.78:1] Subtitles

Distributor  
New Wave Films

#### Festival title

Taxi

Director's onscreen note: The Ministry of Islamic Guidance approves the credits of distributable films. Despite my heartfelt wish, this

film has no credits. I am indebted to everyone who helped us. This film would not exist without their support.



**Shooting fish:** one vignette follows a pair of women transporting their goldfish to an ancient spring

Tehran, present day. The director Jafar Panahi, facing a 20-year state filmmaking ban, is now driving a taxi. He picks up a self-confessed mugger who approves of hanging under sharia law (to the disdain of a female teacher sharing the journey), and a bootleg DVD supplier of otherwise unavailable international titles. He then takes a badly injured man to hospital; the latter's wife insists the DVD seller record her husband's will on his smartphone. Next, a couple of female passengers drop their goldfish bowl during a sudden stop, requiring a plastic bag to ferry the fish to Ali's Spring. Panahi is late collecting his niece from school. She starts filming him on her digital camera, explaining that it's for a class assignment; she is under strict instructions from her teacher to film only what is 'distributable'. She films a street-kid picking up cash dropped by a couple, and is annoyed when the boy fails to return the money, thus rendering her footage 'undistributable'. Panahi gives a lift to a female lawyer, who has been banned by the bar association yet continues to defend a girl convicted of attending a football match. After delivering a broadside against the injustices meted out by the authorities, the lawyer spots a dropped purse in the cab, so Panahi and his niece drive to Ali's Spring to return it to the two women. While the vehicle is unattended, two men steal the dashboard-mounted camera that has captured what we've just watched. The screen goes black.



## Addicted to Fresno

USA 2015

Director: Jamie Babbit

Certificate 15 81m 45s

### Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

In her opening voiceover, Martha (Natasha Lyonne) says that while many people consider a sister to be a best friend who's always there for you, "that's not our story". Instead, the takeaway lesson will be how two differently defective siblings can "sink each other". As a self-proclaimed study in family pathologies, *Addicted to Fresno* is unrevelatory; as a transparent attempt to adopt the improvisatory, riff-until-totally-depleted mode of *Bridesmaids* and other Apatow factory works, it's inept.

Director Jamie Babbit first directed Lyonne in 1999's *But I'm a Cheerleader*, a for-lesbians stab at John Waters terrain that was badly received at the time but has acquired a small cult following. She's since completed several barely noted features (*The Quiet, Itty Bitty Titty Committee*) and directed a great deal of episodic television. In an interview about *Addicted*, Babbit has said that she was interested in reteaming with a newly sober Lyonne (whose past personal problems have been well publicised), cast here – in a knowingly counterintuitive move – as a clean-living, more-or-less together adult; it's sister Shannon (Judy Greer) who's the trainwreck. A sex addict who's lost her job and ruined her life accordingly, Shannon has come to Fresno to work as a hotel maid alongside her sister. When an adulterous relationship with her shrink (a cameoing, reliably hapless Ron Livingston) abruptly ends, Shannon immediately propositions a sleazebag hotel regular. Martha walks in on them having sex and, during the ensuing argument, the man is accidentally killed. Now the two have a body

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Andrea Sperling  
Stephanie Meurer  
**Written by**  
Karey Dornetto  
**Director of Photography**  
Jeffrey Waldron  
**Edited by**  
Suzanne Spangler  
**Production Designer**  
Theresa Guleserian  
**Original Music**  
Nathan Matthew David  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
John Maynard  
**Costume Designer**  
Charlese Antoinette Jones

Gamechanger Films  
presents an Andrea  
Sperling production  
in association  
with Leeden  
Media, Lakeview  
Productions, Talu  
Productions  
A film by Jamie  
Babbit  
**Executive Producers**  
Mynette Louie  
Julie Parker Benello  
Dan Cogan  
Geraldyn Dreyfous  
Wendy Ettinger  
Patty West  
Nick Horbaczewski

**Cast**  
Judy Greer  
Shannon  
Natasha Lyonne  
Martha  
Malcolm Barrett  
Eric

**Jessica St. Clair**  
Kristen  
**Fred Armisen**  
Gerald  
**Molly Shannon**  
Margaret Lipka  
**Michael Hitchcock**  
David  
**Ron Livingston**  
Edwin  
**Allison Tollman**  
Ruby  
**Jon Daly**  
Boris Lipka  
**Kumail Nanjiani**  
Damon  
**Aubrey Plaza**  
Kelly

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]

**Distributor**  
Miracle  
Communications

**Fresno, California, the present. Unemployed sex addict Shannon takes a job as a hotel maid working alongside her sister Martha. As Shannon is having sex with a guest, Martha walks in on them and the man is accidentally killed. To dispose of the body, the sisters try to persuade a couple they know who run a pet cemetery to cremate the body, but are blackmailed for \$25,000 to conceal the crime. They attempt a series of heists to obtain the money. After various mishaps, Martha calls the police and confesses to the crime. Two years later, she is in jail but reconciled with her sister.**



Post-coital distress: Natasha Lyonne, Judy Greer

to dispose of, prompting wacky complications and, in due dreary time, life lessons.

There are lots of pop-culture shout-outs, most of them rather stale (Mark-Paul Gosselaar, Linda Hamilton in *Terminator 2*, 'Baby Got Back'), and a time-stamped confirmation that this is a film made recently in California via an allusion to the state's "serious drought". The improv style and topics of potential discussion are established quickly, when Shannon explains that she "got fired because I fucked a bunch of people". She then launches into an endless list of these people, culminating in the punchline that because one of them was a minor, she's now a registered sex offender. Rape is often a go-to laugh line here, as in the improbable childhood game Shannon tries to bring back into circulation with her understandably resistant sister: "If I raped you right now, what would you do?" Combine riffing with rape and you get dialogue like "That was rape! 100 per cent rape! He was raping the shit out of me!" Per regrettable Apatow convention, these already hobbling comedy scenes are presented in inelegantly edited shot-countershot. Black comedy is hard to pull off when both the material and its assembly are inert.

The jokes about lesbian life are pretty generalised and definitely arguable ("Lesbians are poor, they always are and they always will be"). Here, at least, Babbit gets to fulfil a long-deferred dream of having lots of dildos on screen (she was forced to cut them from *Cheerleader* by the MPAA). Character arcs are dutifully introduced: Shannon must quell her addiction, while inversely, nervous Martha must learn to open herself up to love with gym instructor Kelly (Aubrey Plaza). Finally and inevitably, the film arrives at the moment where bluntly conveyed feelings are felt, as in Martha's closing voiceover: "PS, I hate you, which, in case you forgot, means I love you like a sister."

There's genuine pathos in Lyonne's performance, which draws for impact on her past problems with addiction, as when she tells her sister, "I know you're going to make it – I mean, look at me." But this is generally poor and crude work all round, with top demerits for Greer, who flails through the improv. There is, finally, only so much comic mileage that can be gained from, for example, a montage of the sisters selling stolen dildos on the sly, like minor drug dealers, to a furtive group of diverse customers. It's not a joke that develops with repetition, a problem that applies to much of the film. Ⓔ

## The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution

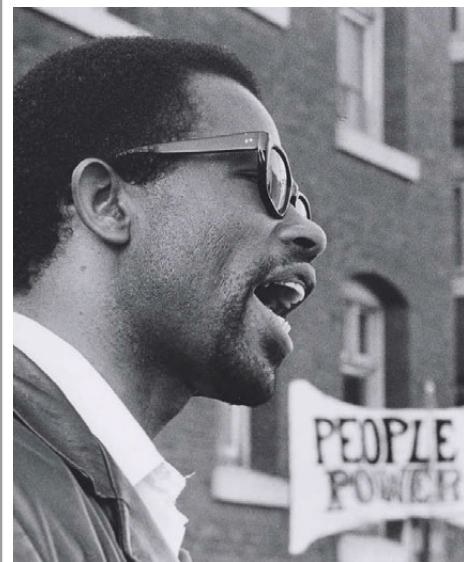
USA 2015

Director: Stanley Nelson

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Rigorous and thorough, pertinent and moving, this compilation of interviews and archive footage examines the various rises and falls of a revolutionary movement that suffered many of the predictable issues of revolutionary movements – internal dissent, external opposition, megalomaniacal leaders, faltering resources – and yet remains unique for the boldness and visibility of its assault on the social status quo of 1960s America. The story is also one of dazzlingly powerful and diverse personalities; and if many of those who held leadership positions are no longer with us, the many associates interviewed here display eloquence and insight in their recollections. Social detail, such as gender relations within the movement and the fact that great numbers of the rank and file were teenagers, is fascinating. Impressively – and rather startlingly, given a current documentary culture dismally willing to accept completely one-sided narratives – director Stanley Nelson has chosen to interview not only the Black Panthers who were prominent at the time and the historians who know their stories, but also the police and FBI officers whose job it was to infiltrate, harass and attempt to 'neutralise' them.

The proportionality and appropriateness of this institutional response is, of course, debatable. If they were being taken as seriously as they wished to be, the Panthers should surely have expected to be monitored: the film does draw out a certain irony in calling for the overthrow of government and then being affronted by said government trying to stand in your way. But certain outrages against the Panthers – most notably the thinly veiled assassination of the charismatic orator and potential future leader Fred Hampton by Chicago police – highlight the extent to which the US authorities sought not only to suppress a threat to social order but to quash and squander all that was positive and constructive in the Panthers' project. Of greatest concern to FBI director J. Edgar Hoover was not the "open, armed war" called for by Eldridge Cleaver (nor his calls for Ronald Reagan to fight him in a duel), but the possibility that the Panthers might find among their number



The long march: Eldridge Cleaver



## Captive

Director: Jerry Jameson  
Certificate 12A 96m 59s

a 'black messiah' capable of inspiring both blacks and whites to question their conditions.

Like any framing of history, the film has gaps. It skips rapidly over the ambiguous circumstances that landed the group's most prominent leader, Huey Newton, in jail for murder, which is particularly frustrating given the extent to which his imprisonment both galvanised the movement by giving it a martyr and a focus and endangered it by passing the reins of control to the volatile Eldridge Cleaver. In the interests of balance and respect, the film could have afforded a little more of its attention to the victim in the case – a white police officer named John Frey – and it's something of a lapse in taste to skip directly from his violent death to a sequence in which various Panthers proudly discuss the fashion sense, swagger and sex appeal that helped make pop-culture stars of their membership.

These are rare tonal misfires, however, in a piece that is otherwise interestingly willing to bear witness to the failings and hypocrisies as well as the passion, the glamour and the best-laid plans of the movement it portrays. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Stanley Nelson Laurens Grant	<b>Greg Quedens</b> Patrick Ulysse	<b>Eric Lockley</b> Nola Nelson Stu Richel
<b>Written by</b> Stanley Nelson	<b>@Firelight Films</b>	<b>Jason Torres</b>
<b>Cinematography</b> Antonio Rossi Rick Butler Allen Moore Cliff Charles	<b>Production Companies</b> Funding provided by Ford Foundation a co-production of Firelight Films, Inc. and the Independent Television Service (ITVS) with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB)	<b>Trudy Williams</b> voice over actors
<b>Edited by</b> Aljeron Tunsil		<b>In Colour</b> [1.78:1]
<b>Music</b> <b>Composed by</b> Tom Phillips		<b>Distributor</b> Dogwoof
<b>Sound Recordists</b> JT Takagi Gautam Choudhury Lauretta Molitor Caleb Mose J. Leo Randolph Jose Smith Claudia Katayanagi Ron Thompson	<b>Voice Cast</b> Angela Arnold Erica Ball Rhon G. Flatts	

A documentary charting the development of the Black Panther movement, which began in Oakland, California, in 1966, when Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale responded to rising instances of police brutality against black citizens by instigating The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. Activists recall how chapters then sprang up in different US cities, with membership escalating rapidly and new leaders emerging, including the uncompromising Eldridge Cleaver. Newton is arrested for the murder of a white police officer, and his imprisonment intensifies both pro- and anti-Panther feeling. The movement expands into social programmes such as free breakfasts for children and free clinics. However, increasing FBI infiltration overseen by J. Edgar Hoover prompts mass arrests, and the movement is crippled by legal costs. Black Panther Little Bobby Hutton is shot and killed by police; Cleaver, who is with him at the time, exiles himself to Algeria to avoid arrest. Under President Nixon, Hoover is granted more power to repress. The members of the New York chapter are arrested on conspiracy charges. Seale is arrested, and rising leader Fred Hampton is killed. Seale runs for mayor of Oakland; after he loses, the Panthers have no money and no lack focus. Support splits between a bitterly divided Cleaver and Newton, and membership bleeds away.

### Reviewed by Jason Anderson

There's not much in the way of distinguishing traits in *Captive*, a based-on-true-events hostage drama that's the latest example of Hollywood's ongoing efforts to court the faith-minded viewers who proved their formidable ticket-buying power with Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) and continue to demonstrate it with recent hits such as *War Room*.

Nevertheless, this turgid feature by journeyman TV director Jerry Jameson provides a new twist on Chekhov's advice about the promise made to an audience when a story casually introduces a fateful object in its first scene. Though it was a rifle for Chekhov, here it's a well-thumbed copy of Christian pastor Rick Warren's self-help bestseller *The Purpose Driven Life*, which a stranger gives to *Captive*'s heroine as she leaves her addiction support group. As Ashley Smith admits in *Unlikely Angel*, the memoir on which *Captive*'s script is based, her first instinct was to put the book in the trash. Yet Warren's tome isn't to be evaded so easily – thanks to Smith's Good Samaritan, the same copy is waiting for Ashley (Kate Mara) when she arrives at work.

Keepers of the faith regarded news of the book's role in Smith's ordeal – she was held hostage in her Atlanta apartment by an escaped prisoner – as testament to the life-changing potential of Warren's "blueprint for Christian living in the 21st century". (Anyone looking for a more unseemly reason for the case's extensive coverage could point to the deep-seated anxieties triggered by a story of a defenceless white woman at the mercy of a desperate black man.) Though Smith hadn't even looked at the book until she began reading it to her captor, Brian Nichols, she credits it with giving her the strength to survive her situation and overcome her addiction.

Thankfully, Mara is only required to recite brief excerpts rather than whole chapters to her abductor. But the script is so steeped in earnest platitudes and clichés that the former *House*



Mellow pages: David Oyelowo, Kate Mara

of *Cards* player may have been better off with the big-screen equivalent of the audiobook. Sporting the straggly hair that's long been the surest sign of a female movie character's drug problems, Mara does what she can to convey the depths of Smith's circumstances and the divinely inspired tenacity that emerges during her ordeal, yet the character remains a cipher.

Similarly overqualified for his work here, *Selma*'s David Oyelowo struggles to make Nichols seem fully human, and all his sweating, grimacing and twitching amounts to little more than signs of actorly strain. As with Mara, the actor's charisma and good looks undermine the director's meagre efforts to emphasise the authenticity of Smith's true-life tale. During the scene of Nichols's deadly courthouse escape, Oyelowo looks more like an Armani model than a man on the lam thanks to the sight of his smooth, chiselled chest under a freshly stolen blazer. Viewers may wonder why the jacket looks perfectly sized but then the Lord does work in mysterious ways. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Terry Botwick Jerry Jameson	<b>Ashley Smith with Stacy Mattingly</b>	<b>Costume Designer</b> Cameron Doyle	<b>Santiago Garcia</b> Galvan Jonathan Gray Brian Bird Elliott Lester Ralph Winter	<b>Leonor Varela</b> Sergeant Carmen Sandoval <b>Jessica Oyelowo</b> Meredith Mackenzie <b>Mimi Rogers</b> Aunt Kim <b>Michael K. Williams</b> Lieutenant John Chestnut	<b>Distributor</b> Paramount Pictures UK
<b>Producers</b> Lucas Akoskin Alex Garcia Katrina Wolfe David Oyelowo Ken Wales	<b>Director of Photography</b> Luis Sansans <b>Editor</b> Melissa Kent <b>Production Designer</b> Sandra Cabriada	<b>Production Companies</b> Paramount Pictures presents a BN Films, Brightside Entertainment, 1019 Entertainment, Yoruba Saxon, Itaca Films production		<b>In Colour</b> [1.85:1]	
<b>Screenplay</b> Brian Bird Based upon the book <i>Unlikely Angel</i> by	<b>Music</b> Lorne Balfie <b>Sound Mixer</b> Mason Donnahoe	<b>Executive Producers</b>	<b>Cast</b> <b>David Oyelowo</b> Brian Nichols <b>Kate Mara</b> Ashley Smith		

Atlanta, Georgia, 2005. Ashley Smith, a widowed young mother who has lost custody of her daughter due to addiction problems, attends a support group before leaving for her job at a restaurant. On the same day at a downtown courthouse, Brian Nichols, a prisoner awaiting the outcome of a rape trial, overcomes a guard and escapes with her gun. He fatally shoots several people before fleeing in a stolen vehicle. As local police detective John Chestnut orchestrates a manhunt, Nichols kills a federal agent and absconds with his truck. Driving near Smith's home and spying her as she retrieves cigarettes from her car, Nichols forces her back inside the house at gunpoint. Though he tapes her wrists and treats her roughly, he insists that he was wrongly accused of the rape and only wants to be with

his newborn son. Behaving erratically, he asks Smith for drugs and she provides him with methamphetamines, though she refuses to consume any herself despite the threat of further violence. Smith reads him passages from *'The Purpose Driven Life'*, a devotional book that she has been given by someone at her support group. The next morning, Smith convinces Nichols to release her so that she can attend her daughter's dance recital. Driving away, Smith calls the authorities and Chestnut and his officers arrive at her home. A standoff with Nichols ends peacefully after Smith pleads with him to give himself up. Smith is reunited with her daughter.

A postscript relates Smith's triumph over addiction, her bestselling account of her ordeal and her subsequently happy family life.



## Censored Voices

USA/Israel/Germany/United Kingdom/Australia/  
Canada/Switzerland/The Netherlands 2015  
Director: Mor Loushy

### Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

In 1967, shortly after the end of the Six-Day War, a 28-year-old Amos Oz and a handful of his fellow kibbutzniks noted a “sense of sadness” pervading their culture alongside the exultation of triumph; they decided to tape a series of interviews with the returning soldiers to find out why, asking them how they felt about what had happened. Notoriously, the tapes were suppressed; the government allowed some 30 per cent of the material to be published, while the rest, strangely enough in such a new, fresh-faced, idealistic democracy, was completely censored. Now, almost half a century later, after a transcription was finally published, the interviews can be heard in Mor Loushy’s documentary, yet again raising questions about Israel, Zionism and the Middle East that may never go away.

Loushy illustrates the audio with a calm dialectic backbeat, editing between ample stock news footage from 1967 and portraits of the soldiers as they are today, old men, pensively listening to their young-man voices describing the incredibly brief war that marked their lives. It’s a clean strategy; Loushy knows that one tip of her political hand in either direction would ghettoise her movie, for the individual viewer in the moment, and for international distribution altogether. In fact, she plays it very safe, as does every film, fictional or otherwise, that evades the moral facts of a particular war by emphasising a soldier’s subjective experience. Initially, the Israeli youngsters are thrilled



Afterthoughts: Amos Oz

and patriotic, and then, once the fighting commences, they are terrified and disillusioned.

Then, the witnesses begin telling a story that’s terribly familiar, from the contemporaneous American troops in Vietnam to the invasion of Iraq: how the Israelis en masse departed from their ideas about themselves and began slaughtering civilians, crushing entire villages, executing unarmed prisoners and generally turning into self-described “murderers”. As their older selves listen inexpressively, the soldiers openly decry their own dehumanisation and their Nuremberg-defence rationales (the brass explicitly ordered them to “kill as many as possible”, even after the ceasefire), and frankly equate the Arabs’ suffering under their boot to that of their parents and grandparents under the Nazis.

But Loushy’s film doesn’t have the scalding impact of the like-structured *Winter Soldier* (1972) because, on one hand, the Israeli troops had to pack their atrocities into a matter of weeks, giving them far fewer horror stories to tell, and on the other, because the famous ‘Nam doc was made during the conflict, and hoped to influence popular opinion. Now, decades after the war, the recordings made by Oz and co seem like just another strand in a fractious mass debate that’s been raging for 50 years. There are only climactic hints, for instance, in the soldiers’ lamenting the seizure of Arab land in Golan and the West Bank, that the pre-emptively begun war was in fact a military stratagem by which to acquire territory, native residents be damned.

The soldiers came away hollowed out, having, one moans, lost the desire “to steal other people’s land”; another simply states, in 1967, that “our whole claim is not justified”. There is nothing the soldiers could have said that hasn’t been said, and countered by Zionist agitprop and general Jewish ambivalence, a million times over since. An excerpted ABC News report from a Palestinian refugee camp is less vague, reporting that to the Arabs it was clear why their villages were being destroyed – to empty them out – and that Israel might as well be declared the 51st state of America. Ⓢ

## Convenience

United Kingdom 2012  
Director: Keri Collins  
Certificate 15 83m 43s

### Reviewed by Alex Dudok de Wit

Remember how inconvenient the convenience store was in *Clerks* (1994)? Well, it’s a fully fledged Tesco superstore next to the petrol station in *Convenience*, where the crinkle-cut crisps are in short supply, the guys behind the till have no idea how to operate it and even the safe won’t open for the benefit of the two men trying to rob it.

Deep in debt to Russian gangsters, Ajay (Ray Panthaki) and Shaan (Adeel Akhtar) decide on an impulse to hold up said petrol station, situated in a forlorn suburb of Swansea. When their plan goes awry, they are obliged to disguise themselves as staff and work in the shop alongside Levi (*This Is England*’s Vicky McClure), the sullen cashier. But they prove no less inept as shop assistants than robbers, and over the course of a surreal nightshift their masks begin to slip. The scene is set for a comedy of errors that pitches itself somewhere between the wry situational humour of *Clerks* and the japey of 2010’s *Four Lions* (from which Akhtar reprises his role as a moronic would-be criminal).

*Convenience* lands a handful of great punchlines along the way. The characters’ stupid predicament and quirky musings on life would have amused Samuel Beckett, and the script, by Simon Fantauzzo (who’s come a long way since his abysmal *City Rats*), revels in the absurdity of their situation. In a typically goofball exchange, Shaan tries to explain that he finds babies unsettling because of their “little human palms”; later, a cutaway to the gagged hostages trying to play I Spy confirms that human folly is not limited to our two hopeless friends. The film also has fun with the sketches built around customers, some of which are inspired (two tipsy toffs asking for goose and strawberry preserve) and some tired (Verne Troyer as a cowboy dwarf – which raises the question: will Troyer ever feature in a skit where his size *isn’t* the joke?). Panthaki and Akhtar are likeable as the robbers without a clue, but McClure is shortchanged out of good lines, and the erudite wit of *Clerks* is missing.



Twit town: Ray Panthaki, Adeel Akhtar

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Daniel Sivan  
Hilla Medalia  
Neta Zwebner  
**Written by**  
Mor Loushy  
Daniel Sivan  
Editor of the book  
*Then Seventh Day*  
– *Soldier’s Talk*:  
Avraham Shapira  
**Co-writer**  
Ran Tal  
**Cinematography**  
Itai Raziel  
Avner Shahaf  
**Edited by**  
Daniel Sivan  
**Original Score**  
Markus Aust  
**Sound Design**  
Yoss Appelbaum

©Censored  
Voices LLC  
**Production Companies**  
Produced in association  
with yes Docu,  
Rundfunk Berlin  
Brandenburg in

association with Arte  
Produced with the  
support of Film  
and Media Fund  
NRW, Rabinovich  
Foundation for  
the Arts – Cinema  
Project, Israel Film  
Council, Geshen  
Multicultural  
Film Fund, Israel  
Film Council  
Made with the  
generous support  
of Impact Partners  
BBC, SBS-TV  
Australia, British  
Columbia’s  
Knowledge Network,  
ICI Radio-Canada  
TV, RTS Radio  
Télévision Suisse  
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endorsement of  
Hot Docs Forum,  
Sheffield Doc/  
Fest, CoPro –  
Documentary  
Marketing  
Foundation.R.A.  
**Executive Producers**  
Dan Cogan  
Danna Stern  
Dagmar Mielke  
Nick Fraser  
Morgan Spurlock  
Jeremy Chilnick  
Ethan Goldman

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]  
Subtitles

**Distributor**  
Dogwoof

**A documentary constructed around the audio confessions, taped in 1967 by Amos Oz and friends, of Six-Day War veterans telling their stories and relating their feelings about the conflict. We see the elderly faces of the soldiers now, listening to the long-censored tapes in which they express a sense of lost innocence, triumph and an overall horror at the atrocities the Israelis were inflicting on civilians and enemy combatants alike. We also see news footage from the time.**



## The Death and Resurrection Show

New Zealand/United Kingdom 2013  
Director: Shaun Pettigrew

### Reviewed by Sam Davies

On 26 February 1979, singer Jaz Coleman and drummer Paul Ferguson – brought together previously by a mutual interest in ceremonial magic, Kabbalah and Wicca – performed a ‘ritual of dedication’ designed to summon the two extra musicians they needed to form a band. The floor was painted black, the pentagram marked out, the correct incantations duly chanted. And shortly afterwards – the unholy power of an ad in *Melody Maker*’s back pages may also have played a part – they recruited Kevin ‘Geordie’ Walker and Martin ‘Youth’ Glover. Dubbed Killing Joke, the four then decamped from London for months of intensive rehearsals in... Cheltenham.

This cocktail of the deeply arcane and the ever so slightly bathetic is a recurrent element in *The Death and Resurrection Show*, Shaun Pettigrew’s exhaustive study of Killing Joke’s career over nearly four decades. Anecdotes abound of out-of-body experiences, band members levitating on Icelandic glaciers and sound engineers being chased by the Eye of Horus; journalists nod along to Ferguson’s description of the band as “the sound of the earth vomiting”. And cropping up throughout the film is Coleman’s very sweet elderly mother, pointing out that he in fact failed his music O-level.

Back in the great wen of London after their Cheltenham incubation, the band found their combination of post-punk aggro, tribal rhythms and doom-laden guitars beginning to take off. At their best, Killing Joke worked like Public Image Ltd rewired with Led Zeppelin’s occult obsessions. But in 1982, just as real success was beckoning, Coleman did a runner to Iceland – where he planned to sit out the imminent nuclear apocalypse. To the consternation of the rest of the group, who had to play *Top of the Pops* with a mannequin on lead vocals, Coleman wouldn’t return. First Walker joined him, then Ferguson, leaving bassist Youth out in the cold (Youth would drift in and out of the group for the next 30 years).

With the apocalypse running behind schedule, Coleman eventually returned, undaunted by his wonky forecasting. The film suggests that, armed with the inside line of esoteric info, he still can’t resist being the bearer of very bad news: over footage of Egypt during the Arab Spring, he solemnly announces: “When Cairo falls, we are a matter of a year maximum away from the singularity.” Coleman’s view is that you can never have too much secret knowledge – in this respect Killing Joke aren’t so much a cult band as a *cults* band. At one point, speaking approvingly of Prague as a place to record, he cites the city’s Black Madonna statues, the Knights Templar, Rosicrucianism, acupuncture



Occult energy: Jaz Coleman

and the psychic energy of underground rivers.

Coleman, you feel, has never come to a crossroads he didn’t briefly consider returning to at midnight with a pre-signed contract and a vial of his own blood, just in case. But for all the three-day fasts and cosmic visions, Killing Joke’s real impact (aside from one mid-80s glimmer of chart success with ‘Love Like Blood’) has come through their influence on bigger-selling bands such as Ministry and Metallica. Their closest brush with world domination probably came indirectly, through the mega-sales of Nirvana, who rephrased a guitar line from the 1984 single ‘Eighties’ as the bassline for ‘Come As You Are’. (Coleman and co opted not to make a legal challenge, and Nirvana’s Dave Grohl subsequently flew to New Zealand to play drums on Killing Joke’s self-titled 2003 LP).

Clocking in at a rather ponderous two-and-a-half hours, Pettigrew’s film is an example of documentary as authorised biography. Narration comes from Coleman himself, reading from his 2014 memoir and ‘ludibrium’ *Letters from Cythera*, and Pettigrew has perhaps got too close to his subject to maintain perspective. Coleman’s experience growing up in Cheltenham with Iranian heritage gets barely a line of acknowledgment, though it’s hard to believe this would be less interesting than one of the band’s producers outlining his belief that the pyramids are alien technology. As a result, *The Death and Resurrection Show* is thorough enough to please the group’s fans but not quite acute enough to reach beyond that audience. **S**

Backstory and characterisation are secondary – at least until the final third, we know nothing about the protagonists except that they are in a shop and in trouble. Actually, this helps to focus the drama: these people are unpredictable to us, and we wonder what they are capable of. But towards the end, the script loses faith in this set-up and contrives some ridiculous plot twists in a bid for emotional heft. A revelation involving Levi and her line manager feels as if it’s been spliced in from another movie entirely, and it sets up an upbeat ending that’s altogether too convenient (the irony).

Had the filmmakers stuck to their guns and focused on the engagingly simple central premise, they would have delivered a well-crafted indie comedy destined for cult status. As it is, one leaves the cinema wondering what happened to the script doctor. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Ray Panthaki	Gee Alahi Amit Kundra	<b>Joe Marsh</b> Drago
<b>Written by</b> Simon Fantauzzo	Ajaz Mirza Nadeem Din	<b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1]
<b>Story</b> Simon Fantauzzo	Mohammad Ayub Sonny Dobran	<b>Distributor</b> B-Attitude Films
<b>Director of Photography</b> Stil Williams	<b>Cast</b> <b>Ray Panthaki</b>	
<b>Edited by</b> Richard Blackburn	Ajay	
<b>Production Designer</b> Tim Dickel	<b>Vicky McClure</b>	
<b>Score</b> King Jacks	Levi	
<b>Sound Mixer</b> Dom Corbisiero	<b>Adeel Akhtar</b>	
<b>Costume Designer</b> Sian Jenkins	Shaan	
	<b>John Norton</b>	
	Neville	
	<b>James Bradshaw</b>	
	Clive	
	<b>Margaret Jackman</b>	
	Mavis	
	<b>Anthony Head</b>	
	Barry	
	<b>Verne Troyer</b>	
	Dwight	
	<b>Daniel Caltagirone</b>	
	Tommy the tiger	
	<b>Duane Henry</b>	
	Richie the panda	
	<b>Velibor Topic</b>	
	Ivan	

Wales, present day. Shaan racks up a debt at a strip club and then flees, seeking refuge at his friend Ajay’s home. With the club’s Russian owners on their tail, the pair drive off, resolving to rob a petrol station to recoup Shaan’s debt. Having tied up the manager and a customer in the office, they realise that the safe will stay locked until 6am. So they decide to spend the night in the shop, pretending to be staff.

Levi, a cashier, emerges from the stockroom and assumes that Shaan and Ajay are new employees. The three work together fairly harmoniously, until Levi spots the hostages in the office. Ajay and Shaan tie her up too, but as they are too incompetent to run the shop themselves, they allow her to return to work. It becomes obvious that they are both attracted to Levi; they argue and pull out their guns, which turn out to be fake.

Levi takes control, shutting the two men in the meat freezer. She frees the floor manager, who is also her father. He reveals that he’s been intercepting letters written to Levi by her absent mother. Furious, Levi ties him up again and releases Ajay and Shaan, whom she has warned to. By chance, the Russians stop by the shop, closely followed by two more robbers. A shootout ensues, in which the Russians and robbers are killed. As the police arrive, Ajay and Shaan escape and meet up with Levi, who has the money from the safe. The three drive off.

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Producers</b> Shaun Pettigrew Brent (Hobe) Abelson	<b>Film Editor</b> Prisca Bouchet	<b>Coffee Films</b> A film by Shaun Pettigrew
<b>Written by</b> Shaun Pettigrew	<b>Sound Mix</b> Eden Martin	<b>Dolby Digital</b> In Colour [1.78:1]
Based on the book <i>Letters from Cythera</i> written by Jaz Coleman	<b>Production Companies</b> ILC Productions,	<b>Distributor</b> Music Film Network
<b>Cinematography</b>		

A documentary about British post-punk group Killing Joke, formed in 1979. Killing Joke’s aggressive fusing of punk, metal and funk with politics and the occult made little impact on the charts but influenced the developing goth and industrial subcultures. The film uses archive footage and interviews with band members and associates to track the group’s turbulent history of break-ups, departures, disappearances and reunions.



## A Dozen Summers

United Kingdom 2014  
Director: Kenton Hall  
Certificate PG 81m 9s

### Reviewed by Alex Dudok de Wit

The paradox of films about children is that they are, of necessity, made by adults. The greatest of these – Miyazaki Hayao's features, say, or Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay!* (1988) – manage to capture the trusting, wide-eyed spirit of youth without condescending to it; but they are structured works, with coherent storylines and thoughtful takes on childhood and its eventual passing. *A Dozen Summers*, by contrast, is a case study in what goes wrong when the children themselves are given too much creative control over a movie.

Directed by sometime actor Kenton Hall, the film is a mockumentary of sorts about the ordinary lives of outspoken twin sisters Maisie and Daisy, played by Hall's own 12-year-old daughters. We watch the pair roam the streets with their friends, get into fights at school, hang out with their single father (played by Hall) and accompany their flighty mother on dates with a succession of moronic boyfriends.

I say 'mockumentary of sorts' because the film never quite settles into any one mode. It opens with establishing shots of Leicester, over which a David Attenborough-esque voiceover recites kids'-flick banalities about how "every story has a beginning" and suchlike. As the camera swoops into a school, the twins intrude into the frame and interrupt the narrator, accusing him of filming kids to sordid ends. They then hijack the production and begin to fantasise aloud about what they'll do with their film. This opening scene is *A Dozen Summers* in a nutshell: all confusing, self-reflexive touches and jejune gags.

Throughout the film, 'real' scenes of the girls' day-to-day activities are intercut with 'imaginary' segments in which they project themselves into their favourite horror and romcom movies. This back-and-forth happens because Maisie and Daisy are notionally in control of the film – but they aren't actually the ones wielding the cameras, and whoever is only seems to be



Girls aloud: Hero Hall, Scarlet Hall

visible to some of the characters. Occasionally the faux-amateur handheld style is replaced with conventional shot-reverse-shot editing, for no apparent reason. The audio mix is all wrong, and this is a distraction, whether it's a deliberate affectation or a genuine oversight.

True to mockumentary style, the dialogue is fairly naturalistic (even if the acting isn't always up to par). The script is credited to Hall, but the young cast must have been encouraged to improvise. Maisie, Daisy and their friends speak exactly like moody 12-year-old girls – that is to say, flatly, without much insight into anything. Punning 'environmentalist' with 'mentalist' is, for them, the height of wit. At times it's hard to shake the impression that you're watching a school-assembly production with a budget.

The idea of getting children to interpret their lives through a camera is novel, if not wholly original (Mark Cousins's *The First Movie* puts a more ingenious and authentic spin on the premise). The problem here is that Maisie and Daisy dominate the film but just aren't very interesting. In his onscreen role, Hall is an engaging presence, but as a filmmaker he is far from rigorous – and a bit too indulgent of his daughters. Ⓢ

## The D Train

USA/United Kingdom 2015  
Directors: Jarrad Paul, Andrew Mogel  
Certificate 15 100m 47s

### Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

'D Train' is just one of the numerous feeble nicknames self-bestowed by the deluded protagonist of Andrew Mogel and Jarrad Paul's curious, sometimes inspired debut feature, a skewed bromance in which both parties have difficulty defining their real selves. It's ultimately dominated by an outsize elephant in the room, one birthed during a transformative event that occurs at the film's halfway point. That the film seems uncertain how to play the resulting fallout from this bombshell is frustrating, yet there's still plenty that's engagingly off-key in Mogel and Paul's script to compensate. It's a two-hander vaguely reminiscent of Miguel Arteta's dark 2000 comedy *Chuck & Buck* – whose co-star Mike White appears and produces here – minus the psychosexual edge, with additional echoes of Bobcat Goldthwait's taboo-confronting social satires.

The self-appointed chairman of his Pittsburgh high-school reunion committee, Dan Landsman (Jack Black) is an overbearing fustpot whose garrulous, control-freak tendencies mask a gnawing awareness of his terminal unpopularity. Dan is despised by the rest of the committee and fixates on social media as a substitute for any real friends, yet has a comfortably beige home life to fall back on: a sympathetic wife (Kathryn Hahn) and a teenage son whose halting efforts to discuss sex are prudishly deflected with comic regularity. When Dan happens across a sunscreen commercial starring former class dreamboat Oliver Lawless (James Marsden), he sees an opportunity to prove his worth: secure the RSVP of the coolest guy at school, and be the toast of the reunion. Duping his Luddite boss – whose chronic technophobia seems initially overegged for laughs yet proves crucial to later developments – with a bogus business prospect, he scores a flight to LA for a one-to-one with his idol.

Dan is so awed by Oliver's rock-star swagger that he fails to grasp it's a facade concealing a hollow core: no coveted star this, more a struggling Hollywood never-was whose sense of inadequacy rivals his pursuer's. What happens next – the polysexual Oliver's casual seduction of Dan following a hedonistic night in the hills – punctuates proceedings with a bold question mark. Various recent comedies, from Lynn Shelton's *Humpday* (2009) to Seth Rogen and James Franco's buddy pictures, have fixed on homosexual panic, but *The D Train* is notable for its head-on approach to what's a pretty tired tendency. However, it can also be sheepish – the one-night stand itself is glimpsed as a cheap, subliminal punchline – and, having gone out on a limb early on, seems conflicted about just how far to run with the material. When Dan returns home in a confused daze, the film's tone apes his turmoil by flip-flopping between bawdy and something more downbeat. Later, Oliver lodges at the Landsman family home, suggesting the potential for a transgressive farce in the mode of François Ozon, but it's a direction the movie steers away from.

As the hapless Dan, for whom friendship and sexuality become muddled in the pursuit of acceptance, Black does his best work since Richard Linklater's *Bernie* (2011), while

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Alexandra Jackson  
Kenton Hall  
**Written by**  
Kenton Hall  
**Director of Photography**  
Geoffrey Gilson  
**Edited by**  
Geoffrey Gilson  
Kenton Hall  
**Art Director**  
Gurdeep Sian  
**Music**  
Andrew Stamp

**Sound Editing and Design**  
Alan Dunwell  
**Costume Design**  
Elisabeth Fowler  
**Alexandra Jackson**  
Hero Hall

@Monkey  
Basket Films  
**Production Companies**  
Monkey Basket  
Films & Poppy Jack  
Productions present

in association with  
Hathi Productions  
& Seven/Five  
Productions a film  
by Kenton Hall  
**Executive Producers**  
Jez Simons  
Himani Simons  
Ary Alcantara

**Cast**  
Hero Hall  
Daisy  
Scarlet Hall

Maisie  
Kenton Hall  
Henry  
Sarah Warren  
Jacqueline  
Ewen MacIntosh  
Gary  
Colin Baker  
narrator  
David Knight  
Samuel  
Kylie Lee  
Etta  
Demi Lou Allen  
Patricia

Yasmin Allen  
Beth  
Holly Jacobson  
Jennifer  
Sophiya Sian  
Audrey  
Robert Bilic  
Tyler  
Quinton Nyrienda  
Matty  
Willow Davies  
boy  
Marcella Just  
girl

Sylvia Robson  
mother

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
**Part-subtitled**

**Distributor**  
Ballpark Film  
Distributors

Leicester, present day. Twelve-year-old twins Maisie and Daisy live with their eccentric single father. They are bored and lippy. Maisie is struggling with the onset of adolescence; Daisy resents the attention her sister gives to boys. When a film crew comes to their school to shoot a children's movie, the girls hijack the production and begin to make a film about their own lives, refracted through their vivid imaginations.

The film crew observes the pair at school and in the neighbourhood, and follows them on visits to their mother, who moves between homes and boyfriends. These quotidian scenes are intercut with re-enactments of the girls' favourite movies, in which they fantasise about visiting

punishments on their playground tormentors.

On a visit to their mother's new house, Maisie and Daisy ask her why she and their father split up. She explains that she was 'impossible' for him, and urges them to find partners who are 'possible' for them. They resolve to find someone 'possible' for their father, and try to set him up with one of their teachers by forging a love letter; the ruse fails. Maisie realises that a classmate she has a crush on is keen on someone else; she seeks advice from her father, who comforts her and tells her that there will be plenty more love interests in her life.

The children's movie, which was interrupted at the start, resumes – but Maisie and Daisy interrupt it again.



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Stars in his eyes: Jack Black, James Marsden

Marsden is shrewdly cast as the dead-eyed, rakish Oliver. In support, Jeffrey Tambor wrings genuine pathos from the plight of Dan's gentle, gullible boss; Hahn, meanwhile, has her substantial comedic chops rather straitjacketed by the limiting role of Dan's blissfully ignorant wife. Provocative to a degree but hesitant to really go off the rails, *The D Train* is nevertheless a pungent spin on masculinity in crisis. **C**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Mike White  
David Bernad  
Jack Black  
Priyanka Mattoo  
Ben Latham-Jones  
Barnaby Thompson  
**Written by**  
Jarrod Paul  
Andrew Mogel  
**Director of Photography**  
Giles Nuttgens  
**Editor**  
Terrel Gibson  
**Production Designer**  
Ethan Tobman  
**Original Music**  
Andrew Dost  
**Sound Mixer**  
Erik H. Magnus  
**Costume Designer**  
Meagan McLaughlin

©D Train  
Productions, LLC

**Production Companies**  
Ealing Studios  
presents an Electric  
Dynamite, Rip  
Cord, Londinium  
production  
A film by Jarrod Paul  
and Andrew Mogel  
**Executive Producers**  
Matthew Medlin  
Aigerim Jakisheva

**Cast**  
**Jack Black**  
Dan Landsman  
**James Marsden**  
Oliver Lawless  
**Kathryn Hahn**  
Stacey Landsman  
**Mike White**  
Jerry  
**Kyle Bornheimer**  
Randy  
**Henry Zebrowski**

Craig  
**Russell Posner**  
Zach Landsman  
**Jeffrey Tambor**  
Bill Shurmer  
**Donna Duplantier**  
Taj  
**Charlotte Gale**  
Renina  
**Denise Williamson**  
Alyssa  
**Han Soto**  
Dale Harkin

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Sony Pictures  
Releasing UK

Pittsburgh, present day. Dan Landsman is the self-appointed chairman of his high-school reunion committee, yet remains unpopular with his colleagues. Spotting Oliver Lawless, a handsome, popular former classmate, starring in a TV commercial, Dan sees an opportunity to boost both his own standing and the reunion's numbers. Fabricating a potential business deal, he arranges for a work trip to Los Angeles to meet Oliver in person – but doesn't bank on his boss, Bill, tagging along. Dan convinces Oliver to attend the reunion. Oliver offers to pose as Dan's non-existent business contact but, to Dan's horror, he closes the deal with Bill. After a hedonistic night out in Hollywood, the bisexual Oliver seduces Dan and the two have sex. Oliver shrugs off the encounter, leaving Dan confused and ashamed. Back home, Dan's popularity surges when people hear that he has secured Oliver's attendance at the reunion. Oliver lodges at Dan's family home, but the two fall out when he refuses to acknowledge their one-night stand. Dan quits the reunion committee. At the reunion, Dan gets drunk and harasses Oliver, who tells the shocked crowd that their encounter meant nothing. Bill learns that the deal was bogus. Before Oliver returns to LA, he and Dan reconcile. An apology posted to the reunion's Facebook group has Dan trending on social media.

## Everest

USA/United Kingdom/Iceland/Italy 2015  
Director: Baltasar Kormákur  
Certificate 12A 121m 14s

### Reviewed by Anton Bitel

"Because it's there." This, reportedly, was George Mallory's laconic response, pitched somewhere between jocular dismissal and rugged existentialism, to the question: "Why do you want to climb Mount Everest?" Mallory disappeared, less than 250 metres from the summit, in 1924. In Baltasar Kormákur's *Everest*, these three words are knowingly echoed by a team on a commercial ascent of the mountain, after Jon Krakauer (Michael Kelly), the journalist embedded with them, rather self-consciously gets round to posing the same inevitable yet unanswerable question. It is 1996 – some three years before Mallory's corpse would finally be discovered, frozen and mummified – and, since the film is drawn from various versions of true events (including Krakauer's article and subsequent novel, which also inspired the 1997 telemovie *Into Thin Air: Death on Everest*), we already know that this expedition too is doomed, and will leave more bodies to become part of the beautiful, forbidding mountainscape that's there.

Different characters try to articulate a better answer. For the team's only female member, Namba Yasuko (Mori Naoko), Everest is the last of the 'Seven Summits' remaining for her to reach. For experienced team leader Rob Hall (Jason Clarke), mountaineering is a lifelong passion, but also a business: he pioneered commercial guided climbs of Everest, and is now having to contend with an overcrowded mountain marketplace, as other entrepreneurial climbers, including Scott Fischer (Jake Gyllenhaal), vie for valuable slots on the dangerous ascent. And for pathologist Beck Weathers (Josh Brolin), whose 2000 book *Left for Dead: My Journey Home from Everest* provides the basis for William Nicholson and Simon Beaufoy's screenplay, mountain climbing is an escape from the "big black cloud" of depression in his middle-class Texan home life, and an activity that makes him feel "reborn" – terms that will be ironised



High stakes: Jake Gyllenhaal

and inverted as all too real dark clouds and miraculous resurrections become the key parts of Beck's own improbable-but-true survival story.

Indeed, tragic ironies abound in this epic docudrama of birth and death, of hubris and humility, where high ambition, human error and elemental extremity combine into a perfect storm. Set in the closest place to the heavens where it is still possible to have one's feet on the ground, naturally *Everest* is a grand spectacle (available in Imax and 3D versions), framing fragile human lives against the elevating scale of the Himalayan peaks (the actual shoot was divided between the foothills of Everest, the Italian Alps and various studios). Yet dealing once again, as he did in *The Deep* (2012), with death and survival *in extremis*, Kormákur also focuses on the lifelines (and phonelines) through which these people with their heads in the clouds are linked to the earthier, more domestic concerns they have left behind. It's just a pity that, in docu-dramatising five lives lost, the film doesn't find room, even in the coda's factual recap, to acknowledge the three climbers from a separate team of Indo-Tibetan Border Police who also died in their descent that same day. Such an omission smacks of snow blindness, if not total whiteout. **C**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Tim Bevan  
Eric Fellner  
Baltasar Kormákur  
Nicky Kentish Barnes  
Brian Oliver  
Tyler Thompson  
**Screenplay**  
William Nicholson  
Simon Beaufoy  
Based on extracts  
from the book *Left for Dead: My Journey Home from Everest* by Beck Weathers with Stephen G. Michaud and the article *The Death Zone* by Peter Wilkinson, first

published in *Men's Journal* in 1996  
**Director of Photography**  
Salvatore Totino  
**Editor**  
Mick Audsley  
**Production Designer**  
Gary Freeman  
**Music by/Conductor**  
Dario Marianelli  
**Sound Designer/Supervising Sound Editor**  
Glenn Freemantle  
**Costume Designer**  
Guy Speranza  
**Stunt Co-ordinators**  
Jamie Edgell

Tony Lucken  
©Everest Film Holdings, LLC  
**Production Companies**  
Universal Pictures and Cross Creek Pictures present in association with Walden Media a Working Title production  
In association with RVK Studios and Free State Pictures  
A Baltasar Kormákur film  
Made with the support of the

BLS South Tyrol  
Alto Adige fund  
**Executive Producers**  
Angela Morrison  
Liza Chasin  
Evan Hayes  
Randall Emmett  
Peter Mallouk  
Mark Mallouk  
Lauren Selig  
Brandt Anderson

**Cast**  
**Jason Clarke**  
Rob Hall  
**Josh Brolin**  
Beck Weathers  
**John Hawkes**

Doug Hansen  
**Robin Wright**  
Peach Weathers  
**Emily Watson**  
Helen Wilton  
**Michael Kelly**  
Jon Krakauer  
**Keira Knightley**  
Jan Arnold  
**Sam Worthington**  
Guy Cotter  
**Martin Henderson**  
Andy Harris, 'Harold'  
**Elizabeth Debicki**  
Caroline MacKenzie  
**Ingvar Sigurdsson**  
Anatoli Boukreev  
**Jake Gyllenhaal**  
Scott Fischer

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Some screenings presented in 3D**

**Distributor**  
Universal Pictures  
International  
UK & Eire

In 1996, Rob Hall, head of Adventure Consultants, leaves his pregnant wife Jan behind in New Zealand to lead a commercial ascent of Everest with a team that includes 'Outside' journalist Jon Krakauer, mailman Doug Hansen, pathologist Beck Weathers and businesswoman Namba Yasuko, as well as Rob's fellow guides and basecamp crew. During the months spent acclimatising his team at base camp, Rob notices that the mountain is overcrowded with commercial climbers. He decides to team up with Scott Fischer's rival outfit Mountain Madness. On 10 May, the teams ascend from

Camp 4. Snowblind, Beck has to stop on the Balcony, a small platform some 8,400 metres up. Most of the others reach the summit, though they are delayed along the way by a lack of fitted ropes. On his way down, Rob agrees to turn back and help Doug to the top. A powerful storm strikes. Some, including Jon, make it back to camp. Doug, Yasuko, Scott, and – heroically returning to help Rob – assistant guide Andy 'Harold' Harris, all die. After making satellite-relayed calls to Jan, Rob also dies. Left for dead and severely frostbitten, Beck returns to camp and then home to Texas.



## Fresh Dressed

USA 2015

Director: Sacha Jenkins

### Reviewed by Frances Morgan

Sacha Jenkins's film is an exploration of the symbiotic relationship between fashion and pop music, and an examination of the economics and politics of men's clothing and style in contemporary African-American and Hispanic culture. At first, celebration is to the fore. As rapper Nas puts it, "Wardrobe has always been a thing" – and the accompanying photographs of ornately dressed African kings and 19th-century slaves in their Sunday best allude to the complexities of identity, resistance, aesthetics and commerce that lie beneath that statement. But these remain in the background of a smooth historical narrative which opens with 1970s New York and the 'warrior' styles of its rival gangs before landing exuberantly in the early 1980s with the emergence of the B-boy look that came to define hip-hop around the world.

As with any subcultural narrative, the early days are the most optimistic, buzzing with DIY energy and organic connections such as that between LL Cool J and graffiti artists the Shirt Kings, whose customised T-shirts he and other artists helped to make famous. The tension between poverty and luxury in tales of going without food or furniture in order to buy sneakers is expressed as a point of pride, while entrepreneur Dapper Dan's description of his bootlegged Louis Vuitton and Gucci creations crystallises how high-end brands came to be seen as both aspirational and subversive. "I blackenised it," he says of the way he used knock-off fabric to create his own remarkable designs. "I made it so it looked good on us." As another interviewee points out, Dan's designs should have netted him a career in high fashion, but instead his boutique was closed down after he was accused of copyright infringement.

The latter is just one example Jenkins gives of the often highly unequal relationship between street style and a fashion industry that alternately embraces, appropriates and rejects it; and it's this that gives *Fresh Dressed* its substance. The interview-heavy format of the film works in its favour: without the commentary of fashion professor Elena Romero and Rocawear's Damon Dash, for example, one could easily be left with an enjoyable but uncritical runway show. The portion of the film that traces the mainstreaming of hip-hop through the 1990s in parallel with pioneering 'streetwear' labels interweaves insights on design and business from Cross Colors' Carl Jones and the eponymous founder of Karl Kani. After facing initial resistance from department-store buyers – which seems like little more than thinly veiled racism – what Romero calls a dynasty of designers emerged



Style counsel: *Fresh Dressed*

during that decade, culminating in fashion lines headed by musicians or record-label owners themselves. For every success story – Sean 'Puffy' Combs's Sean John label, Russell Simmons's Phat Farm, Jay-Z's Rocawear – there are the cynical likes of Eminem's Shady Ltd, of which rapper and Play Cloths founder Pusha T observes, "As a consumer, you knew it was a money play."

As Romero points out, not all the labels have had staying power. She points to an underlying lack of confidence in black brands, with today's musicians once again favouring European fashion houses and perennially popular American giants such as Ralph Lauren, who are in turn happy to poach visual ideas from street fashion. For Kanye West, this relationship is an uneasy one, in which, "The class conversation is bigger than the race conversation... that's why they [the designers] don't want to work with rappers." A new homegrown model is suggested by Public School, a young New York duo who bring urban influences to minimal Raf Simons-esque designs.

Kanye's participation in the film is a coup, not just because he's a megastar but because he is a critical one, though even he has little to say about the film's implicit theme of how black masculinities are created and defined by fashion. Regarding the eclectic styles emerging from the mid-2000s onwards, a sharply suited Swizz Beatz credits not only the internet but "the embracing of homosexuality", yet this statement is left hanging. The tension of how to perform being a man – "from the block to the boardroom", as Combs puts it – runs through *Fresh Dressed*, unresolved but urgent, driving its protagonists' creativity. 📺

## A Haunting in Cawdor

USA 2015

Director: Phil Wurtzel

### Reviewed by Anton Bitel

"What's done cannot be undone," says Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, driven to madness (and soon suicide) by the ineradicable stain of guilt for murders that she has instigated. It's a line that 21-year-old Vivian (Shelby Young) repeats several times in Phil Wurtzel's *A Haunting in Cawdor*. Herself medicated for mental illness and guilty of a murder committed six years earlier (plea-bargained to manslaughter), Vivian has been assigned with a group of others to a three-month work-release programme at a theatre on the outskirts of the fictitious Michigan town of Cawdor (another nod to *Macbeth*), where middle-aged, one-time Tony-winner Lawrence O'Neil (Cary Elwes) uses drama as a form of therapy for young offenders. Lawrence is restaging the 'cursed' Scottish play – which, with its witches, ghosts and pervasive sense of doom, is the Shakespeare work that comes closest to the horror genre – for the first time in two decades in an attempt to exorcise not only his wards' demons but also some of his own. Cast as the murderous Lady Macbeth, however, Vivian soon finds herself haunted by the traumas of her own past and the unrestful ghosts of Lawrence's previous production (which ended in a real tragedy).

Shot on location at the Barn Theatre in Augusta, Michigan, and made back-to-back with Wurtzel's documentary *The Barn Theatre: Tomorrow's Stars Today*, *A Haunting in Cawdor* may sound on paper a little like Travis Cluff and Chris Lofing's recent *The Gallows*, which also concerned the fateful reprise of a haunted production. Wurtzel's feature, though, eschews that film's cheap jump shocks, sensationalist thrills and strict found-footage format, preferring to use a barebones ghost story to explore the 'magical' properties of impersonation and the liberating catharsis of performance. In this respect, it falls into line with a body of recent films including Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Birdman*, Olivier Assayas's *Clouds of Sils Maria*, Miike Takashi's *Over Your Dead Body* and Isabel Coixet's *Another Me* – which all have narratives unfolding around theatrical productions and are



Stage fright: Shelby Young

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producers**  
Peter Bittenbender  
Nasir Jones  
Marcus A. Clarke  
**Director of Photography**  
David Vollrath  
**Editor**  
Andrea B. Scott  
**Original Score**  
Tyler Strickland  
**Sound Mixer**

Rick Cardone  
©Cable News  
Network, Inc.  
**Production Companies**  
CNN Films presents  
a Mass Appeal  
production  
A film by Sacha  
Jenkins

**Executive Producers**  
Vinnie Malthotra  
Amy Entelis

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]

**Distributor**  
Dogwoof

**A documentary exploring the connections between fashion and hip-hop. The film examines the street style of the 1980s, the success of streetwear labels such as Cross Colors in the 1990s and the clothing lines designed by rappers including Sean 'Puffy' Combs. Interviews with designers, fashion historians, label owners and musicians including Nas, Kanye West, Big Daddy Kane and Pharrell Williams offer commentary alongside archive footage from TV shows, commercials, street photography and music videos.**



← concerned with the shifting borders between staged fictions and real life.

The question of whether Vivian's consciousness is being possessed by her PTSD and medication, by the spirit of previous Lady Macbeth Jeanette (Alexandria DeBerry) or by the play itself (whose witches, distorted by in-camera effects, regularly appear to her) ensures that the plot remains ambiguous, overdetermined and irrational. Still, the play's the thing: whether rehearsed live on stage or seen in staticky old VHS recordings, *Macbeth* in its many iterations here represents a mysterious world of enactment and imagination where the buried past keeps being repeated in the present, where ghosts of the dead return and where, in the role of others, the players can, perhaps, find themselves. Think of this 'prison drama' as *Caesar Must Die* (2012), only with added spooks and a wood chipper from the horror genre. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Phil Wurtzel  
Larry A. Lee  
Lolly Howe  
**Written by**  
Phil Wurtzel  
**Director of Photography**  
Stephen Smith  
**Editor**  
Thomas Sabinsky  
**Production Designer**  
Kelly Anne Ross  
**Music Composer**  
Todd Maki  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Robert Langley  
**Costume Designer**  
Jenna Ritter

©Friel Films LLC  
**Production Company**  
Friel Films presents

**Cast**  
**Shelby Young**  
Vivian Miller  
**Michael Welch**  
Roddy O'Neil  
**Alexandria DeBerry**  
Jeanette Welles  
**Cary Elwes**  
Lawrence O'Neil  
**Nancy Lynette Parker**  
Agnes – witch 1  
**Lauren Rys Martin**  
Silas – witch 2  
**Jordan Burgess**  
Marie – witch 3  
**Charlie King**  
Charles Kosack  
**Bethany Edlund**  
Tina Bailey  
**Julie Grisham**  
Mackenzie Cane  
**Samantha Rickard**  
Lisa LaFontaine  
**Anna Bradley**  
Terri Welles

**Philip David Black**  
Brian Daly

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Miracle Communications

Cawdor, Michigan, present day. Having been abused in childhood, convicted of manslaughter and frequently committed to psychiatric care, 21-year-old Vivian Miller attends the Barn Theatre for a three-month work-release programme. Theatre owner Lawrence O'Neil proposes staging 'Macbeth' for the first time in 20 years, casting Vivian as Lady Macbeth. Brian, one of the other young people on the programme, takes an unwanted sexual interest in Vivian; she is also occasionally visited by new friend Roddy, who is looking for a job at the theatre. Vivian repeatedly sees an apparition of Jeanette, who disappeared two decades earlier after playing Lady Macbeth. Vivian tells her psychiatrist about these visions and he puts her back on medication. Via an old VHS recording, Jeanette asks Vivian to help her escape a sinister hooded male. One night Vivian screams when discovering someone in her bed – but there is no one there. After rehearsing a scene in which Lady Macbeth sees blood on her hands, and narrowly escaping being hit by a mysteriously falling spotlight, Vivian too imagines that there is blood on her hands. Brian tries to grope Vivian at a party and, kicked out, dies after being pushed into a wood chipper by a hooded figure. When Vivian accuses Lawrence of killing Jeanette, he reveals that it was his son, Roddy, who died, by his own hand. The hooded figure is the lovesick Roddy's ghost. In a fit of jealousy, Roddy tries to strangle Vivian, as he did Jeanette, but is stabbed by Jeanette's ghost. The investigating police find only static on the VHS.

## Hellions

Canada 2015  
Director: Bruce McDonald

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

It's now customary to preface reviews that discuss a film's major twist with a spoiler warning – though the practice is slightly trickier when dealing with a movie like *Hellions*, which closes ambiguously but strongly suggests particular interpretations of what we have just seen. The bookending sequences, in which small-town teenager Dora (Chloe Rose) wakes up in hospital after some trauma and wanders down to the maternity ward to survey a room full of babies, are open to several possible readings. Is one of the babies hers, and has the whole interim (during which her pregnancy seems to have come near to term over the course of an evening) been a nightmare vision? Has she lost her baby through her own actions and is looking at other people's offspring and wondering what might have been? Or did the whole business with the masked figures coming to claim her unwanted foetus to swell their evil ranks really happen after all?

Directed by Bruce McDonald, who made 2008's unusual and very effective *Pontypool*, *Hellions* is for the most part an above-average supernatural horror with a nice sense of escalating terror as, on an already bad day, a teenage girl dressed up for Halloween night in an ironic angel costume is besieged in her family home by hellions – child-sized, masked imps whose malevolence has a nastily mischievous edge. When the conflict strays outside the house, McDonald uses red filters to suggest a magic-hours limbo in which the rules of space and time have been warped – the cop who helpfully explains the origins and ambitions of the monsters finds the disembodied hallway of his old home stranded in the wild woods. The little monsters evoke the malign creatures that often cropped up in 1970s TV movies, such as the trolls out to snatch away Kim Darby in the original *Don't Be Afraid of the Dark* (1973) or the Zuni fetish doll that chases Karen Black around her apartment in *Trilogy of Terror* (1975).

*Pontypool* was also a siege movie but with linguistic tics, as a zombie virus nestled inside the English language. *Hellions*, however, seems a more conventional runaround, perhaps an expanded episode of the Halloween-themes anthology



Life expectancy: Chloe Rose

movies *Trick 'r Treat* (2007) or *Tales of Halloween* (2015). There's a weird black-comic edge to the way Dora's small community makes a big deal out of the Halloween holiday – a sober receptionist at the doctor's surgery has a toy axe stuck into her head – but this makes sense in a place where the hellions are a real and recurrent threat.

However, the punchline is a variation on the 'and then she woke up' theme, which – classic status aside – was an uncomfortable cop-out at the end of *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and hasn't really been redeemed by its frequent use in inside-the-mind-of-a-lunatic films from *The Cabinet of Caligari* (1962) to *Shutter Island* (2010). At least *Hellions* doesn't deploy the biggest cliché of the form, the what-really-happened montage, but it still makes audiences feel as if they've been rapped over the knuckles for daring to take it at face value as a horror movie. Indeed, it seems deliberately to overlook a particular strength of the genre, in that the heroine's worries over her pregnancy work perfectly well as a subtext, without the movie needing to pull back and insist it was about something serious all along. In essence, there's nothing inherently trivial about a film in which someone is tormented by wicked, infernal creatures – just as there's nothing necessarily meritorious about addressing a real-world problem rather than setting out simply to be scary. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producer**  
Frank Siracusa  
Paul Lenart  
**Written by**  
Pascal Trotter  
**Director of Photography**  
Norayr Kasper  
**Editor**  
Duff Smith  
**Production Designer**  
Andrew Berry  
**Music Composed by**  
Todor Kobakov

Ian LeFeuvre  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Zenon Waschuk  
**Costume Designer**  
Sarah Millman

©Hellions Productions Inc.  
**Production Companies**  
Produced by Whizbang Films & Storyteller Pictures

With the participation of Telefilm Canada, Ontario Media Development Corporation and Bell Fund  
In association with The Movie Network a division of Bell Media Inc., Movie Central a Corus Entertainment Inc. Company

**Cast**  
**Chloe Rose**  
Dora Vogel  
**Rachel Wilson**  
Kate Vogel  
**Rossif Sutherland**  
Dr Gabe Henry  
**Peter DaCunha**  
Remi Vogel  
**Luke Bilyk**  
Jace  
**Emir Mokhtarieh**  
Buckethead  
**Adelaide Humphreys**

Lionhead  
**Joe Silvaggio**  
Baghead  
**Ella Konopka**  
bumblebee girl  
**Stacey McGunnigle**  
bumblebee mother  
**Karlo William**  
mummy kid  
**Devon Phillipson**  
skeleton kid  
**Robert Patrick**  
Officer Corman

**Dolby Digital In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
**Distributor**  
Studiocanal Limited

US, Halloween, present day. Seventeen-year-old Dora Vogel is told by her doctor that she's pregnant, but she can't bring herself to tell her mother Kate or boyfriend Jace. While Kate takes Dora's little brother Remi trick-or-treating, Dora stays home and considers ending her pregnancy. Masked, child-sized figures repeatedly visit the house, and play an escalating series of pranks on Dora. One of these hellions opens its sack to reveal Jace's severed

head. The pranks become murderous attacks. Local policeman Corman responds to a call for help and reveals that he lost his wife to the hellions – they appear on Halloween to claim unwanted babies, who then join their number. Dora finds herself besieged in the house as the foetus inside her is turned into a hellion, which she tries to cut out of her womb. Dora awakes in hospital, perhaps having imagined the whole experience, and no longer pregnant.



## Hitman: Agent 47

USA/United Kingdom/Germany 2015  
Director: Aleksander Bach  
Certificate 15 96m 11s

### Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

As played by Rupert Friend, the eponymous assassin of *Hitman: Agent 47* might be the least prepossessing protagonist in recent cinema, and it's fortunate that he generally takes a back seat to Hannah Ware's more appealing Katia, the movie's real hero. (The film ought to be titled *The Hitman: Agent 47 and Her*, if only to amuse viewers of a certain age.) Agent 47 – a monosyllabic skinhead in black suit and red tie – is essentially a psychopath who spends his evenings sharpening knives; Katia begins the film as an obsessive researcher, but under his tutelage learns how to be a ruthless killer.

Though based on a video game, this dreadful film may well have been produced by a fifth column of non-gamers to discredit videogames (it is based on the computer-game series of the same name). Every – no doubt wrong and unfair – reactionary assumption about them is confirmed. The worst thing is probably the baddies, who are devoid of personality and may therefore be killed like insects. They are also incredibly inept: at one point Agent 47's gleaming red Audi is multiply harpooned in the middle of Singapore; but somehow the half-dozen bad guys, so good with the slow harpoon, are useless with guns, and fail to land a single shot on the Agent, who takes them all down with boring ease. 📉

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Charles Gordon  
Adrian Askarieh  
Alex Young  
Skip Woods

#### Screenplay

Skip Woods  
Michael Finch

#### Story

Skip Woods  
Based on the  
videogame *Hitman*  
by IO-Interactive

#### Director of

Photography  
Ottar Gudnason

#### Film Editor

Nicolas de Toth

#### Production

Designer  
Sebastian Krawinkel

#### Music

Marco Beltrami

#### Production

Sound Mixer  
Ed Cantú

#### Costume Designer

Sabine Daigeler

Visual Effects  
& Animation

Industrial Light  
& Magic

Visual Effects  
Mokko

Rise Visual  
Effects Studios

ARRI

#### Stunt Co-

ordinators  
USA:  
Chris O'Hara  
Jonathan Eusebio  
Germany:  
Ralf Haeger  
Volkhart Buff

©Twentieth  
Century Fox Film  
Corporation and  
TSG Entertainment  
Finance LLC

**Production  
Companies**  
Twentieth Century  
Fox presents a  
Daybreak, Adrian  
Askarieh, Giant  
Pictures production  
Made in association  
with TSG

Entertainment and  
Dayday Films  
Produced in  
association with  
Ingenious Media

A Fox International  
Productions  
(Germany)  
production  
Produced with  
the support of  
Medienboard

Berlin-Brandenburg,  
Deutscher  
Filmförderfonds

#### Executive

Producers  
T. Michael  
Hendrickson  
Daniel Alter  
Marco Mehlitz

#### Cast

Rupert Friend  
Agent 47

Hannah Ware  
Katia

Zachary Quinto  
John Smith

Ciarán Hinds  
Peter Litvenko

Thomas  
Kretschmann  
Le Clerq

Angelababy  
Diana

Dan Bakkedahl  
Sanders

#### Dolby Digital

In Colour  
[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

20th Century Fox  
International (UK)

Berlin, present day. Two rival organisations, Syndicate International and International Contracts Agency, try to capture Katia, a young woman with ESP, in order to find her father Peter Litvenko, a geneticist whose experiments led to the creation of a series of near-invincible fighters, including ICA's Agent 47 and Katia herself. The Syndicate wants to reactivate the programme; ICA wants to stop it. Katia joins forces with Agent 47, whom she accompanies to Singapore, where her father is hiding. After a series of chases and fights, Agent 47 helps Litvenko to kill both himself and the head of Syndicate International.

## The Intern

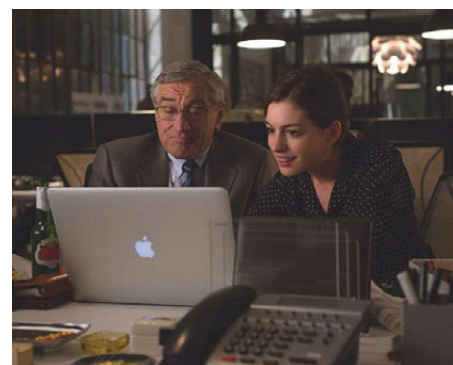
USA 2015  
Director: Nancy Meyers  
Certificate 12A 121m 22s

### Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

The intersection of old- and new-school values takes centre stage in *The Intern*, writer-director Nancy Meyers's latest breezy, blandly entertaining confection. With Anne Hathaway starring as the brittle, workaholic boss of a hip fashion e-tailer and Robert De Niro as her unlikely lackey, it inevitably suggests a topsy-turvy twist on the spikier *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), right down to the focus on a distorted work-life balance and the broken relationships left in its wake. But where that film's master-servant narrative grew increasingly fractious, here it's one that blossoms benignly from scepticism to respect and admiration. As a comedy, it's infinitely more palatable than the notionally similar *The Internship* (2013), a wretched extended promo for Google in which middle-aged guys Owen Wilson and Vince Vaughn infiltrated the egregiously youthful tech giant's HQ. Even so, it falls short on real laughs, frequently opting instead for baggy sentiment, particularly in a latter half that veers away from its engaging odd-couple pairing.

The narrative concerns Brooklyn widower Ben Whittaker (De Niro), who has tired of retirement, despite packing his days with activities from tai chi to cruise holidays, and is desperate to find a real challenge. Enter About the Fit, a booming (and conspicuously white) apparel start-up that has launched a community outreach programme to recruit senior-citizen interns. Submitting an impressive video application and coasting through a round of interviews led by staffers barely out of their teens – “Where do you see yourself in ten years?” “I’m 70!” – Ben is placed with Hathaway's hyperactive company founder Jules Ostin, who's none too happy with the arrangement. Resisting pressure to hire a CEO to lighten her frantic workload, Jules barely sees drippy, too-saintly-to-be-true househusband Matt and their overly angelic young daughter, a situation that causes no amount of strain. Ben, summoning his veteran New Yorker smarts and no-nonsense wisdom, gradually wins Jules over, progressing from minor aggravation to trusted helper, driver and eventually supreme confidant.

Always dressed in a suit, in contrast to the casualwear sported by his colleagues, Ben finds his old-world, gentlemanly ways eliciting first



Keen streets: Robert De Niro, Anne Hathaway

smirks but later a kind of reverence. In the most amusing collision of bygone and future days, it's revealed that the company's gleaming, MacBook-festooned premises have replaced the phonebook factory where Ben toiled for much of his working life. Jules comes to depend on his practical, plain-speaking advice – there's even a sliver of romantic tension in their heart-to-heart discussions, though it's never overplayed. It's evident that, at some level, hi-tech Jules connects more intuitively with this product of the old school than with the ‘new man’ she married.

De Niro gives his strongest performance in some time as the understated, ineffably decent retiree, an unflappable foil to Hathaway's twitchy whirlwind of industry. Although his age – and intact virility – is occasionally mined for cheap gags, Ben is thankfully no hopelessly out-of-touch stereotype or stubborn curmudgeon. In fact, he's drawn as open-minded and flexible, even finding romance with the firm's in-house masseuse (Rene Russo). On the other hand, his character is so devoid of any discernible flaws that he sometimes comes across as a Brooklyn Dalai Lama.

As Ben and Jules's bond is gradually cemented, the film ambles along in sugar-frosted, fairly predictable fashion, punctuated by the occasional raucous set piece. Meyers, though, overestimates our investment in the fraying marriage that takes precedence in cloying later stages, with Matt such an unappealing sap that it's tough to care about the outcome. You can't help feeling that she spent too much time with the wrong couple. 📉

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Nancy Meyers  
Suzanne Farwell

#### Written by

Nancy Meyers

#### Director of

Photography  
Stephen Goldblatt

#### Film Editor

Robert Leighton

Production Designer  
Kristi Zea

#### Music

Theodore Shapiro

Production Mixer  
Danny Michael

Costume Designer  
Jacqueline Demeterio

©Warner Bros.  
Entertainment Inc.  
and RatPac-Dune  
Entertainment LLC

#### Production

Companies  
Warner Bros. Pictures  
presents a Waverly  
Films production

A Nancy Meyers film

**Executive Producer**  
Celia Costas

#### Cast

Robert De Niro  
Ben Whittaker

Anne Hathaway  
Jules Ostin

Rene Russo  
Fiona

Anders Holm  
Matt

Andrew Rannells  
Cameron

Adam Devine  
Jason

#### Celia Weston

Doris  
Nat Wolff

Justin  
Linda Lavin

Patty  
Zack Pearlman

Davis  
Jason Orley

Lewis  
Christina Scherer

Becky

**Dolby Digital**

**In Colour**

Colour by  
Technicolor

PostWorks  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Warner Bros. Pictures  
International (UK)

Brooklyn, present day. Retired widower Ben Whittaker is selected through a community outreach programme to be a senior intern at booming online fashion retailer About the Fit. Ben is placed with workaholic founder Jules Ostin, whose husband Matt is a full-time father to daughter Paige. Jules, who's being encouraged by both colleagues and the neglected Matt to hire a CEO to lighten her workload, is initially sceptical but gradually won over by Ben's no-nonsense attitude. He doubles as Jules's driver, and in time becomes her trusted confidant and adviser. Ben discovers that Matt is having an affair. During a trip to San Francisco to interview a prospective CEO, Jules confides in Ben about Matt's cheating and his pressuring her to cut down on her work commitments. Ben insists that Jules shouldn't compromise her status. Matt, apologising for his infidelity, stops Jules from hiring the CEO. They determine to save their marriage.



## Lessons in Love

USA 2014  
Director: Tom Vaughan  
Certificate 15 99m 23s

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The film that's now being released in the UK as *Lessons in Love* has had a history of alternative titles, having variously flopped under the monikers *Some Kind of Beautiful* and *How to Make Love Like an Englishman*. The latest name is, I suppose, meant to give it a chance at a new lease of life. Which, of course, is what Pierce Brosnan's English professor gets a crack at after travelling from Cambridge to California, a transition accompanied by one of the more egregious affronts of the movie's psychological-warfare soundtrack.

Director Tom Vaughan and screenwriter Matthew Newman manage to be equally unconvincing whether dealing with academic politicking, Romantic poetry, immigration procedure, bedroom farce or relationships between sets of fathers and sons and sisters. If one makes it through this gauntlet of clichés, it can only be thanks to the proven charisma of the film's stars: Brosnan is joined by Salma Hayek, as his sister-in-law/love interest Olivia, and by Malcolm McDowell, who plays his father Gordon, a one-time faculty rabble-rouser. My own patience wore down around the time I heard the old line "You know what? You're a really great dad" – always the cue for a middle-aged star to give a shy, sad, stoic, winning smile. Whatever name a distributor calls this off by, it ain't getting any better. 📞

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Richard Barton Lewis  
Beau St. Clair  
Kevin Frakes  
Raj Brinder Singh  
Remington Chase  
Grant Cramer  
Simon Orange  
**Written by**  
Matthew Newman  
**Director of Photography**  
David Tattersall  
**Edited by**  
Matthew Friedman  
**Production Designer**  
John Collins  
**Music**  
Stephen Endelman  
David Newman  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Richard Lightstone  
**Costume Designer**  
Lizzy Gardiner

**Production Companies**  
PalmStar  
Entertainment  
presents a SouthPaw  
Entertainment and

Irish DreamTime  
production  
In association  
with The Solution  
Entertainment  
Group, Merced  
Media Partners,  
PalmStar Media  
Capital, Envision  
Entertainment  
and SPD Films  
In association  
with Landafar  
Entertainment  
**Executive Producers**  
Pierce Brosnan  
Lisa Wilson  
Myles Nestel  
Michael R. Williams  
Matthew Newman  
Stepan Martirosyan  
Stuart Brown  
Mike Sullivan

**Cast**  
**Pierce Brosnan**  
Professor  
Richard Haig  
**Salma Hayek**  
Olivia  
**Jessica Alba**  
Kate

**Ben McKenzie**  
Brian  
**Fred Melamed**  
Piggot  
**Ivan Sergei**  
Tim  
**Malcolm McDowell**  
Gordon  
**Lombardo Boyar**  
Ernesto  
**Merrin Dungey**  
Angela  
**Duncan Joiner**  
Jake  
**Lee Garlington**  
Wendy  
**Robert Mailhouse**  
Alan  
**Marlee Matlin**  
Cindy

**Dolby Digital In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Arrow Films

US theatrical title  
**Some Kind of Beautiful**

Cambridge, present day. Richard is a professor who specialises in the Romantic poets and uses their verse to seduce his female students. One of these, American grad student Kate, becomes pregnant, and so Richard follows her to Los Angeles. After she leaves him for another man, he stays in the pool house of the home they'd shared and helps to raise their son. While struggling to placate the immigration authorities, Richard begins a relationship with Kate's older half-sister Olivia. Deported back to the UK, he makes peace with his estranged father before returning illegally to California to propose to Olivia.

## Life

United Kingdom/Canada/Germany/Australia/USA 2014  
Director: Anton Corbijn  
Certificate 15 111m 2s

### Reviewed by Roger Clarke

It's not hard to see why Anton Corbijn, whose career as a photographer pre-exists his more recent fame as a filmmaker, should have been drawn to the story of the celebrated *Life* magazine photo-essay on James Dean that helped both to herald and fashion the myth just as *East of Eden* arrived. After playing Allen Ginsberg's muse Lucien Carr, a key figure of the Beat generation, in *Kill Your Darlings* (2013), Dane DeHaan comfortably returns to the 1950s as the nascent star, both aware of his growing fame and, like Carr, his mesmeric effect on other people.

It's clear, though, that Corbijn's interest is not with Dean at all but with the struggling photographer Dennis Stock, played by Robert Pattinson in what could well be his best performance to date. This is not a straight Hollywood biopic but a more nuanced 'hustle' movie, which has more in common with the likes of *Sweet Smell of Success* (1957) than the countless Dean biopics there have been over the years. Its beautifully shot narrative moves easily between three landscapes – the slick lustre of West Hollywood, the downbeat crush of New York and the snowbound rustic chill of Indiana, where Stock witnesses Dean surrounded by the warmth of his simple farming family, who have somehow and mysteriously produced this magical creature. For any journalist who has had to spend days in the company of a young and rising star, as this reviewer has, the film is full of true notes about fame, showing how the forces of self-doubt and adulation work against each other at its outset. It has a strong script by Luke Davies, who wrote the original novel for the Heath Ledger vehicle *Candy* (2006); the soundscape is all cool jazz, Lightnin' Hopkins and the loud buzz of the red light in the photographic developing room where the film opens.

There are a couple of scenes with Ben Kingsley as movie mogul Jack Warner, who

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Iain Canning  
Emile Sherman  
Christina Piovesan  
Benito Mueller  
Wolfgang Mueller  
**Screenplay**  
Luke Davies  
**Director of Photography**  
Charlotte Bruus Christensen  
**Editor**  
Nick Fenton  
**Production Designer**  
Anastasia Masaro  
**Music**  
Owen Pallett

**Sound Mixer**  
John Thompson  
**Costume Designer**  
Gersha Phillips

©See-Saw Films  
PTY Limited, First  
Generation Films Inc.,  
Barry Films GmbH,  
Channel 4 Television  
Corporation and  
Screen Australia  
**Production Companies**  
Téléfilm Canada,  
Film4, Screen  
Australia,  
Filmförderung

Hamburg Schleswig-Holstein present in association with FilmNation Entertainment, Corner Piece Capital, Entertainment One, The Harold Greenberg Fund, Cross City Sales a See-Saw Films, First Generation Films, Barry Films production  
A film by Anton Corbijn  
Produced in association with The Movie Network

a division of Bell Media Inc. and Movie Central, a Corus Entertainment Company  
Produced with the participation of Téléfilm Canada, Film4, Screen Australia, Filmförderung Hamburg Schleswig-Holstein  
In association with Corner Piece Capital, Ontario Media Development Corporation,

The Harold Greenberg Fund  
**Executive Producers**  
Tessa Ross  
Mark Slone  
Michel Merkt  
Mark Roberts  
Sheldon Rabinowitz  
Ross Jacobson

**Cast**  
**Robert Pattinson**  
Dennis Stock  
**Dane DeHaan**  
James Dean  
**Joel Edgerton**  
John Morris

**Alessandra Mastronardi**  
Pier Angeli  
**Stella Schnabel**  
Norma  
**Ben Kingsley**  
Jack Warner

**Dolby Digital In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
El Films

US, 1955. Dennis Stock is a penniless young photographer from New York, trying to make a living in Hollywood. At a party, he meets the little-known actor James Dean and strikes up a conversation with him, securing an invitation to a preview screening of Dean's film 'East of Eden' the following day. Impressed by Dean's screen presence, Stock pitches a photo-essay on the actor to 'Life' magazine. He is commissioned, but securing Dean's cooperation proves difficult. Stock is

forced to follow the actor to New York, where he takes a series of pictures of Dean; however, these fail to meet the approval of his photographic agent. Dean suggests that Stock accompany him to his home in the Midwest. The pictures Stock takes of Dean on his family's farm provide the 'soul' his agent is looking for. Feeling guilty at not spending enough time with his wife and young son, Stock turns down Dean's invitation to accompany him back to Los Angeles to film 'Rebel Without a Cause'.



Still centre: Robert Pattinson, Dane DeHaan



## Listen to Me Marlon

United Kingdom/USA 2015  
Director: Stevan Riley

See Industry,  
page 12

### Reviewed by Violet Lucca

In popular histories of cinema, the man who routinely stands for method acting, American actors or, in very lazy accounts, acting in total, is Marlon Brando. Tragic in a very different way to his contemporary James Dean, he was, so the story goes, a bright young thing possessed of preternatural talent and Roman beauty who degenerated into a screwy, bloated egomaniac demanding ever larger pay cheques. Amid the familiar 'fame corrupts' narrative, we're usually offered for context the same few films (*A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Wild One*, *On the Waterfront* and *The Godfather*), each neatly representing a turning point in the history of American cinema (the loosening of the Production Code, teen culture, the blacklist, New Hollywood).

Blessedly, *Listen to Me Marlon* goes far beyond this *Behind the Music*-style reductionism, revealing (as Brando himself did in his 1994 autobiography, *Songs My Mother Taught Me*) that the actor's flaws came from a childhood marked by his physically and verbally abusive father and alcoholic mother, and that he regretted how this had translated into his treatment of women and his children. Constructed from several hundred hours of Brando's personal audio recordings – diaries, rants, self-hypnosis/meditation tapes, home movies and even an 'interview' with his third wife Tarita Teriipaia early on in their courtship – along with clips of his performances, television interviews and archival

photographs, the documentary can be thought of as an assisted, posthumous auto-portrait.

Unlike this year's *What Happened, Miss Simone?* and *Amy*, which use home movies, interviews and their subjects' performances (as well as interviews with friends and family) to propel the narrative forward, or Mark Rappaport's 1996 hybrid documentary *From the Journals of Jean Seberg*, which has a stand-in for the actress musing on her life and screen roles, here director Stevan Riley has the benefit of Brando telling his own story in his own words, in the privacy of his own home, giving it an added layer of authenticity and a distinctive flavour. (Nancy K. Peardon's memoir about her time as Brando's friend and professional assistant, replete with verbatim exchanges between herself and the actor, is engrossing for this reason – he had a singular gift for phrasing and a sharp, zany wit.)

The half-natural, half-fabricated nature of *Listen to Me Marlon* finds an apt visual metaphor in the film's first image: in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Brando had his face digitally scanned while he made different expressions and recited *Macbeth*'s "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" soliloquy. This 3D Brando appears here against a black screen, and then floats through a wood-panelled house intended to pass as his Hollywood compound. It's a wistful and funny image, made even stranger as Brando giddily expresses his thoughts about the future: "Actors aren't going to be real, they're going to be inside a computer. You watch – it's gonna happen! So maybe this is gonna be the swansong for all of us." (Brando was a huge technology fan who constantly attempted to come up with new patents after growing bored with acting; in 2001, he conceived of an online video site that was essentially what YouTube is today.)

All through the tapes, Brando offers an unsparring view of himself (for a stretch in the 80s, he pre-recorded his lines and spoke them after hearing them through an earpiece), the business of Hollywood and directors he'd worked with (his version of how Francis Ford Coppola treated him more than explains what's shown in *Hearts of Darkness*). Like many who maintain sincere, high ideals of artistic craft and/or politics, it seems that Brando found his psychological wounds only deepening with age; certainly, the imprisonment of his son Christian in 1991 and the death of his daughter Cheyenne in 1995 didn't help.

While we aren't asked to forgive any of his excesses, we come to understand them intimately. The sequence in which Brando expresses his beliefs about acting and independence, set to images of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, reframes that disastrous moment in his career (when Brando was first labelled an overly demanding diva), drawing a parallel between Fletcher Christian's rebellion against Captain Bligh and Brando's against the Hollywood order. Insights into his role in African-American and Native American civil rights movements are also touching and timely: given the crocodile tears during John Legend and Common's performance of the *Selma* song 'Glory' at this year's Oscars, it's refreshing to see the eye-rolls and boos when Sacheen Littlefeather refuses his Best Actor statue for *The Godfather* in 1973. In light of Brando's uncompromising ideas about dramaturgy, one can only imagine what he would think about Riley's superb finished product. **S**

## The Lobster

Ireland/United Kingdom/Greece/  
France/The Netherlands 2015  
Director: Yorgos Lanthimos, Certificate 15 118m 26s

See Feature  
on page 28

### Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

The first half of *The Lobster* is set in a hotel whose 'guests' must find a mate within 45 days or be turned into an animal of their choice. One evening, they have to watch simple parables performed by the staff. In 'Man Eats Alone', a man chokes on something and dies; in its companion piece, 'Man Eats with Woman', he chokes on something and lives – because the woman is there to perform the Heimlich manoeuvre. Obviously, the audience gets it; but not only that, no one raises an eyebrow at how obvious it is. The world of *The Lobster* is governed by cruel and unexplained rules and inhabited by people who never question them; whereas *The Lobster* itself is designed to be enjoyed by people who do – by an audience primed to accede to its demands to make comparisons with Kafka and call its stabs of comedy 'absurdist'. But I'm not convinced that the spectacle of the audience passively absorbing these parables isn't much less basic than the parables themselves.

Taken as a dystopia, *Lobster-land*, physically a self-consciously unnamed corner of Europe, has been arrived at through a process of exaggeration. The societal pressure to form procreative relationships is turned into an injunction; the 'biological clock' is given a *Logan's Run* twist; and unremarkable assumptions – centrally, that couples should have something in common – become iron laws. David (Colin Farrell) is sent to the hotel after being left by his wife, and to stave off the threatened metamorphosis enters into a relationship with a hyperbolically heartless woman, for which purpose he has to seem not to care when she appears to choke to death. As the perversity of this episode suggests – he at once obeys and defies the lesson of 'Man Eats with Woman' – the hotel can be taken less literally, as a manifestation of David's post-divorce anxieties, but there is plenty that remains within the realm of dystopian satire.

The hotel's often arbitrary rules belong to a far more repressive and prescriptive society than the modern Europe in which the action takes place. But however dated, the object of the satire is clear enough during the film's first half, which has its share of rather non-absurdist, weakly observational comedy, as when the hotel manager (Olivia Colman) explains that by having children the hotel's new couples (who have to complete a probation period before being released into society) will be able to block out any other problems they might have.

The film's second half is harder to fit into either interpretation, dystopian satire or post-divorce anxiety nightmare. By night, the hotel inmates are forced to go out into the nearby woodland and hunt 'loners', winning extra days on top of the statutory 45 for each one they capture. After the Heartless Woman (few of the characters have names) kills his dog (formerly his brother), David takes sanctuary among them, but finds that the loners have their own set of unreasonable rules – or really just one: no sex, no kissing, no flirting – enforced with equal cruelty. Here, inevitably, David finds a woman he can fall in love with (Rachel Weisz), and they make a secret go of it until their discovery by the

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

John Battsek  
R.J. Cutler  
George Chignell

#### Written by

Stevan Riley

#### Co-writer

Peter Ettedgui

#### Director of

Photography

Ole Bratt-Birkeland

#### Edited by

Stevan Riley

#### Production

Designer

Kristian Milsted

#### Re-recording Mixer

George Foulgham

©MB Films Ltd

#### Production

Companies

Showtime presents

a Passion Pictures

production

A Stevan Riley film

Co-produced by

Universal Pictures

Home Entertainment

Content Group

#### Executive

Producers

Andrew Ruhemann

#### Film Extracts

Viva Zapata! (1952)

Drums along the

Mohawk (1939)

#### The Godfather

(1972)

The Men (1950)

A Streetcar Named

Desire (1951)

Mutiny on the

Bounty (1962)

Superman (1978)

Julius Caesar (1953)

Reflections in a

Golden Eye (1967)

The Formula (1980)

Casablanca (1942)

The Maltese

Falcon (1941)

The Searchers

(1956)

Taxi! (1932)

The Public

Enemy (1931)

Dancing Lady (1933)

Grand Hotel (1932)

Gone with the

Wind (1939)

Bedtime Story

(1963)

A Countess from

Hong Kong (1966)

The Night of the

Following Day (1968)

Taza, Son of

Cochise (1953)

Last Tango in

Paris (1972)

Burn! (1968)

The Missouri

Breaks (1976)

#### The Call of the

Wild (1935)

The Fugitive

Kind (1960)

The Wild One (1953)

On the Waterfront

(1954)

Mr. Deeds Goes

to Town (1936)

City Lights (1931)

Apocalypse

Now (1979)

Hearts of Darkness

A Filmmaker's

Apocalypse (1991)

Guys and Dolls

(1955)

Candy (1968)

One-eyed Jacks

(1960)

#### In Colour

Universal Pictures

International

UK & Eire

A documentary culled from hundreds of hours of personal audio recordings made by the actor Marlon Brando (1924-2004), illustrated with clips of his performances, home movies, archival photographs and interviews.





**Blind love:** Colin Farrell, Rachel Weisz

Loners' leader (Léa Seydoux), who then has Weisz's character professionally blinded. What remains a constant in the hotel and among the loners is the extreme insistence on couples' having something in common, and so the film ends with David weighing up whether or not to blind himself in sympathy. The rules of the hotel, even when arbitrary, are more or less recognisable; the arbitrary rules of the woodland are less those of an indifferent universe or an inhumane society than those of a writer-director too palpably seeking to evoke the idea of these things and achieve some formal balance while doing it.

The failure of *The Lobster* is ultimately a matter of form. The allegory fails to ring true partly because the narrative and our engagement

with it are deliberately undermined in pursuit of a misbegotten Brechtianism. The narrator narrates things as we see them. Dramatic music plays over undramatic scenes. What would conventionally be the film's emotional climax, when Weisz's character reveals to David that she is blind, is performed with minimum affect. Director Yorgos Lanthimos's most irritating device, as in his breakthrough feature *Dogtooth* (2009), is the shop-worn 'shock unresolved ending' – the cut to black before a crucial decision is made. The point of Brechtian 'distancing' was to reveal to the audience the real social forces governing the action; it is senseless to apply it to a world governed by unreal forces whose origin and purpose are coyly withheld. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Ed Guiney  
Lee Magiday  
Ceci Dempsey  
Yorgos Lanthimos  
**Written by**  
Yorgos Lanthimos  
Efthimis Filippou  
**Director of Photography**  
Thimios Bakatakis  
**Edited by**  
Yorgos Mavroparisidis  
**Production Designer**  
Jacqueline Abrahams  
**Sound Designer**  
Johnnie Burn

**Costume Designer**  
Sarah Blenkinsop  
  
@Element Pictures,  
Scarlet Films, Falro  
House Productions  
SA, Haut et Court,  
Lemming Film, The  
British Film Institute,  
Channel Four  
Television Corporation  
**Production Companies**  
Film4, Bord Scannán  
na hÉireann/The  
Irish Film Board,  
Eurimages, The  
Netherlands Film

Fund, Greek Film  
Centre and BFI  
present in association  
with Protagonist  
Pictures, Scarlet  
Films, Falro House,  
Haut et Court and  
Lemming Film  
co-production in  
association with Limp  
With the participation  
of Canal+, Ciné+,  
Aide aux Cinémas  
du Monde, Centre  
National du Cinéma  
et de l'Image Animée,  
Ministère des

Affaires Étrangères  
et du Développement  
International,  
Institut Français  
Made with the  
support of the  
BFI's Film Fund  
**Executive Producers**  
Andrew Lowe  
Tessa Ross  
Sam Lavender

**Cast**  
Colin Farrell  
David  
Rachel Weisz  
short-sighted woman

**Jessica Barden**  
nosebleed woman  
**Olivia Colman**  
hotel manager  
**Ashley Jensen**  
biscuit woman  
**Ariane Labeled**  
maid  
**Angeliki Papoulia**  
heartless woman  
**John C. Reilly**  
lispman  
**Léa Seydoux**  
loner leader  
**Michael Smiley**  
loner swimmer  
**Ben Whishaw**  
limping man

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
**Part-subtitled**

**Distributor**  
Picturehouse  
Entertainment

Europe, the present. After being left by his wife, David is incarcerated in a seaside hotel where, if he doesn't find a mate within 45 days, he will be turned into an animal of his choice, as has happened to his brother, whom David now keeps as a dog. The hotel is governed by numerous harshly enforced rules, one of which is that couples must have something in common.

David pretends to be unfeeling in order to commence a relationship with an unfeeling woman, but she sees through him and kills his brother to test whether he is truly heartless, and his tears tell against him. With the help of a maid, David escapes into the hands of the 'loners', who inhabit

the woodland near the hotel and are hunted by the hotel-dwellers each night. After David joins them, the loners raid the hotel and break up some of the couples. The loners are also subject to various rules, above all that they must remain single. David, however, falls in love with one of them – a woman who, like him, is shortsighted. On the day before they plan to run away, their secret relationship is discovered by the loners' leader, who blinds the woman as punishment. David ties up the leader and leaves her to be eaten by dogs, then runs away with the woman to the city. At a restaurant, David goes to the bathroom, intending to blind himself with a knife.

## Made You Look

**A Film About Creativity in the Digital Age**

United Kingdom 2015, Directors: Paul O'Connor, Anthony Peters, Certificate 12A 71m 46s

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

This portfolio of interviews plays rather more like a promotional reel for its subjects – artists and designers who trade in the sort of pseudo-industrial typography, woodland creatures and whimsical monsters that are currently de rigueur in high-end gift shops, hipster bars and classy adverts – than the study of changing forms that its title suggests.

The impact of digital technology on creative practice is just one of a succession of interview questions, and it receives an unchallenged and unchallenging response: the interviewees agree that digital and analogue modes of self-expression can happily coexist, and that while the internet helps them work, they also wouldn't mind if it was switched off.

Such shruggy consensus is typical of a film that, while slickly compiled and always affable, has a bemusing tendency to repeat exactly the same observations in slightly altered wording. So mild is the vibe that it's comparatively thrilling when a couple of interviewees – art director/designer/illustrator Kate Moross and illustrator/artist Pete Fowler – colour outside the lines a bit by gently criticising the fetish for the past presently at play in their industry. No one discusses current conditions in art training or education, let alone whether or how they themselves make money; or surviving in London as a trainee artist; or choosing to do things outside London; or any political or social meanings their work might have. Every single interviewee is a white person. They are all charismatic and interesting, a lot of their work is lovely, and watching them actually create is a voyeuristic pleasure. The only sharp edges, however, belong to the scalpels wielded by the paper artists. Ⓢ



**Graphics fix:** Pete Fowler

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producer**  
David Waterson  
**Original Concept**  
Anthony Peters  
**Director of Photography**  
Stuart Smith  
**Editor**  
Paul O'Connor  
**Music**

**Composed by**  
Mathieu Karsenti  
  
@Look & Yes media  
**Production Company**  
A Look & Yes film

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]

**Distributor**  
Independent  
Distribution

A documentary in which British graphic designers, illustrators and commercial artists discuss their creative practices, with a particular focus on the influence on their sector of digital technology and the internet, and the concurrent reversion of many artists and designers to analogue techniques and retro visual language.



## Make More Noise! Suffragettes in Silent Film

United Kingdom 2015  
Directors: Bryony Dixon, Margaret Deriaz  
Certificate PG 74m 46s

See Feature  
on page 35

Reviewed by  
**Ginette Vincendeau**

Released to coincide with Sarah Gavron's drama *Suffragette*, this compilation of newsreels and short films dating from 1913 to 1917 takes its title from a speech the great suffragette leader Emmeline Pankhurst gave in November 1913, when she said: "You have to make more noise than anybody else, you have to make yourself more obtrusive than anybody else."

The irony is not lost, a century later, looking at women being 'noisy' in silent film. Nevertheless the women Pankhurst was addressing – directly (in the US on that occasion) and indirectly – succeeded, eventually, in being heard in their quest for voting rights. As the film tells us at the end, those rights were finally granted in Britain, partially in 1918, and fully in 1928. But it took more than women making a nuisance of themselves for that to happen, and the film makes clear the crucial role played by the war in the advancement of women's rights.

The central idea that structures the film's editing is to contrast a series of events in the campaign for votes for women (including women's participation in the war effort) with the comic representation of suffragettes in popular films. The first strand tells a relatively familiar story, though one well worth retelling, using archive footage to document women at rallies, at demonstrations in British cities (London, Newcastle), meeting politicians to advance their cause, being suspected of arson and so on. There is a clear desire to show the suffragettes as a mass movement, with crowd scenes and intertitles announcing, for example, "Suffragettes amongst the lasses". Inevitably, though, the newsreels concentrate on the stars of the movement, such as Pankhurst (seen at one point with her daughter Christabel) and the tragic scene at the Derby as Emily Davison steps out in front of the king's horse, followed



*A Day in the Life of a Munition Worker (1917)*

by her funeral. The documentary also includes longer films that depict women taking part in the war effort – working in a munitions factory at home and running a military hospital in France. While these undoubtedly illustrate how women taking on 'male jobs' and being exceptionally brave helped to secure them the vote, they slightly unbalance the film. It would have been interesting, for instance, to see the lives of 'ordinary' women too to give another relevant context to the heroic behaviour of the activists.

A brilliant stroke is the decision to include comic films that offer an irreverent but equally revealing insight into the era's gender relations, showing both male fears in the face of the 'threat' of women's emancipation and the spirited response of the women. The comic sketches run the gamut of early film genres: men in drag parodying suffragettes, or a classic chase scene in which a policeman pursues a naughty little girl. A more elaborate narrative centres on a 'henpecked' husband who dreams that he becomes prime minister in charge of getting rid of suffragettes, condemning them to forced labour or (my favourite) "six weeks in trousers" – until rudely awakened by his wife. But the revelation to the non-initiated surely must be the Tilly Girls, the comic duo formed by the blissfully exuberant Alma Taylor and Chrissie White. White reappears in *Wife the Weaker Vessel*, in which she pretends to be fragile to marry a rich man, until she's had enough of the pretence, starts punching him and goes fishing with a woman friend while their husbands look after the babies.

Accompanied by an excellent new score written and performed by Lillian Henley, *Make More Noise!* succeeds in combining the pleasures of rediscovering early film with an unsentimental view of the continuing struggle for women's rights – which, while a long distance from the suffragettes, is unfortunately still not over. **S**

## The Martian

USA/United Kingdom 2015  
Director: Ridley Scott  
Certificate 12A 141m 24s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

The casting of Matt Damon as a stranded astronaut who becomes the subject of an international-slash-interstellar rescue mission in *The Martian* is witty: it turns Ridley Scott's film into a spiritual sequel to *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). It's also successful in so far as Damon gives precisely the sort of strong, persuasive performance needed to magnetise what is at heart a kind of solo survival drama. After being separated from his crewmates during a mission-aborting storm on the surface of Mars – the site of a Nasa expedition evidently several 21st-century decades in the making – Damon's Mark Watney revives to find that they've left him for dead and resolves to make sure they live to regret their error. To do so he must find a way to grow food and purify water in the midst of an inhospitable environment.

*The Martian* is basically two movies in one. The first – and superior – drama involves Mark's efforts to "science the shit" out of his situation, devising ingenious schemes with whatever is lying around his otherwise abandoned habitat-shelter and offering alternately witty and bitter asides to various video recorders. For a while, Mark's monologues are strictly a coping mechanism, but eventually he makes contact with Earth and a second, less compelling movie begins crossing over with the first one – a kind of mission-control melodrama in which famous actors (Jeff Daniels, Chiwetel Ejiofor) playing government functionaries frown at computer screens and have tense conversations with each other about what's at stake in devoting untold fiscal and intellectual resources to recovering their lost comrade.

Because Damon is a movie star, we know that Mark isn't going to die halfway through the film, and because *The Martian* is a gigantically scaled blockbuster directed by Ridley Scott, we know that things won't be too easy for him either. Whatever sense of wonder is manifested in the film's immaculately shot and lit 3D images is undermined by the mechanical grinding of the script by Drew Goddard, which tries to disguise its on-the-beat progress with humour (the weirdest earthbound science whizz is played by cult stand-up comedian and rapper Donald Glover). The mixture of widescreen majesty and quirky comedy feels exactly like the calculated, something-for-everyone strategy that it is, and as the film goes along, this attempt to make everybody happy starts to infiltrate the narrative as well. Soon it's not just the Americans who want to get Mark back but the Chinese, and then the rest of the world – hands across the galaxy.

A more ambitious (read: less expensive) film might have tried to subvert – or at least politely undermine – this coalition-building twist, or to introduce some notes of tension in the scenes featuring Mark's crew, who are slowly en route back to Earth when they find out that their pal is OK and immediately decide to go back and get him despite the time (and danger) this adds to their return flight. (The captain is played by Jessica Chastain, our new first lady of grown-up sci-fi dramas.) But *The Martian* is designed to open big in all the corners of the globe and to give those paying customers their

### Credits and Synopsis

**Programmed by**  
Bryony Dixon  
Margaret Deriaz  
**Edited by**  
Douglas Weir  
**Music Composed and Performed by**  
Lillian Henley

©British Film Institute

**Production Companies**  
A programme from the BFI National Archive  
Digitisation funded by Unlocking Film Heritage - awarding funds from The National Lottery

**In Black & White**  
[1.33:1]

**Distributor**  
BFI Distribution

A compilation of British newsreels and films taken from the BFI National Archive; dating from 1913 to 1917, the footage charts the development of the suffragette movement and the campaign to obtain votes for women in the UK. The newsreels show significant events in suffragette history, such as the 1913 Derby race where Emily Davison threw herself in front of the king's horse, while documentaries detail women working in a munitions factory or running a hospital on the Western Front. Throughout the film, these images are contrasted with comic shorts that parody the suffragettes or show disruptive women having fun.

The end credits reveal that in the UK women over 30 were granted the vote in 1918 and all women obtained the vote in 1928.



# Maze Runner The Scorch Trials

USA 2015

Director: Wes Ball

Certificate 12A 130m 52s

## Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

The second instalment of this high-octane teen franchise is an entertaining collection of greatest hits from the dystopian sci-fi playbook. Fans of the novels by James Dashner will find little they recognise here beyond the basic set-up: a deadly plague called the Flare has killed most of humanity and a shady group of scientists, who rather give the game away by calling themselves WCKD, want the blood of the handful of youngsters who are naturally immune to the virus. For some reason, it was once deemed necessary to test the endurance of these teenagers by trapping them in a maze with some killer spider-robots. However, by the time *The Scorch Trials* begins, this ordeal is just an occasionally traumatic memory: the heroic Thomas (Dylan O'Brien) and his small band of fellow survivors (notably Thomas Brodie-Sangster, Ki Hong Lee, Alexander Flores and Kaya Scodelario) have been rescued and brought to a heavily fortified base run by the sinister Janson (Aidan Gillen). They are told that they are safe, but Thomas correctly surmises that there is something fishy about the set-up, and sure enough he is soon contacted by a fellow inmate, Aris (Jacob Lofland), who shows him the gruesome truth. It's up to Thomas to lead a daring escape and cross a zombie-filled desert landscape to reach a rebel camp in the far-off mountains.

Quite a lot of plot duly ensues, but none of it matters much: sheer momentum is the thing. This is a machine-tooled action thriller that hits all its beats and times all its climaxes by the book, while cheerfully raiding ideas and visuals from the giants of the genre – it's *The Walking Dead* meets *Mad Max* meets *Alien* meets every film where people crawl through ducting, or escape from an exploding building, or conduct a tense, torchlit search around a dark and mysteriously deserted spaceship, sorry, underground camp. The now slightly stale gladiatorial element that tied the first instalment in with the likes of *The Hunger Games* has thankfully disappeared, leaving us with a straight-up tale of resourceful heroics against imaginatively stacked odds. O'Brien, as our hero, is a competent and suitably nondescript collection of chiselled cheekbones and muscles. He and his band of loyal but not very interesting followers are wisely augmented by some new talent, including Giancarlo Esposito, who steals



Maze Runner: The Scorch Trials



Green zone: Matt Damon

money's worth, emotionally speaking, and so it takes the paths of least resistance.

Reportedly, the 2011 source novel by Andy Weir is more tied to the perspective of its protagonist, and it's easy to imagine a leaner, meaner version of *The Martian* that stays inside the fear and stubbornness of a person whose hours are literally numbered instead of pulling back to show the cavalry coming in. That movie might in fact look more like *Gravity* (2013), which was at once less intellectually rigorous than Scott's film – the focus here on science-

as-saviour is sure to prove controversial to American audiences – and more relentlessly effective as a thrill machine. It's also harder to detect a directorial signature here. Scott's style is magisterial but dull; he doesn't even play with scale and cutting the way Christopher Nolan did in *Interstellar* (2014). Ultimately, this is an elaborate, massively budgeted film about an army of talented people working together to accomplish something that feels very small in the grand scheme of things. In other words, *The Martian* is a perfect allegory for itself. Ⓢ

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Simon Kinberg  
Ridley Scott  
Michael Schaefer  
Aditya Sood  
Mark Huffam  
**Screenplay**  
Drew Goddard  
Based upon the novel  
by Andrew Weir  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Dariusz Wolski  
**Film Editor**  
Pietro Scalia

**Production Designer**  
Arthur Max  
**Music by/Score**  
**Conducted by/Piano**  
Harry Gregson-Williams  
**Supervising**  
**Sound Editor/**  
**Sound Designer**  
Oliver Tarney  
**Costume Designer**  
Janty Yates  
**Stunt Co-ordinator**  
Rob Inch  
**Visual Effects**  
MPC

Framestore  
The Senate  
Industrial Light  
& Magic  
@Twentieth  
Century Fox Film  
Corporation and  
TSG Entertainment  
Finance LLC  
**Production**  
**Companies**  
Twentieth Century  
Fox presents in  
association with  
TSG Entertainment

A Scott Free/Kinberg  
Genre production  
A Ridley Scott film  
**Executive Producer**  
Drew Goddard

**Cast**  
**Matt Damon**  
Mark Watney  
**Jessica Chastain**  
Melissa Lewis  
**Kristen Wiig**  
Annie Montrose  
**Jeff Daniels**  
Teddy Sanders

**Michael Peña**  
Rick Martinez  
**Sean Bean**  
Mitch Henderson  
**Kate Mara**  
Beth Johansson  
**Sebastian Stan**  
Chris Beck  
**Aksel Hennie**  
Alex Vogel  
**Mackenzie Davis**  
Mindy Park  
**Benedict Wong**  
Bruce Ng  
**Donald Glover**  
Rich Purnell

**Chen Shu**  
Zhu Tao  
**Eddy Ko**  
Guo Ming  
**Chiwetel Ejiofor**  
Vincent Kapoor

**Dolby Atmos**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
20th Century Fox  
International (UK)

Mars, the near future. The members of Nasa's Ares 3 mission are forced to evacuate due to an intense dust storm. One of the crew, botanist Mark Watney, is separated from the others and left for dead when his commander, Melissa Lewis, makes the decision to fly back to their vessel, the Hermes, without him. Mark realises that there is no chance of rescue for at least four years – and even then only if he can make contact with Earth. He sets about finding a way to grow food crops in a makeshift field in his pressurised habitat and creates a water supply by burning hydrazine. He manages to contact Nasa by driving a rover out to a buried probe that's still connected to mission control.

On Earth, Nasa's scientists start working on

plans to deliver supplies to Mars; director Teddy Sanders debates with his colleagues whether or not to let the other Ares crew members know that Mark is still alive. In the year that follows, Mark experiences various successes and struggles, including the destruction of his crops during a storm; a supply shipment prepared for him by Nasa burns up on lift-off. A young astrodynamist named Rich Purnell figures out that a slingshot trajectory could give the Hermes enough momentum to get back to Mars and retrieve Mark; the crew votes to try it, against Sanders's wishes. Mark prepares an ascent vehicle and blasts into orbit, where he's eventually caught by Lewis and brought back home.



## McFarland, USA

USA 2014

Director: Niki Caro

Certificate PG 128m 45s

### Reviewed by Jason Anderson

As an inspirational, based-on-true-events sports drama that bears the Disney brand and features Kevin Costner in the trusty guise of crusty coach, *McFarland, USA* shouldn't seem the slightest bit radical. Yet since this second Hollywood feature from New Zealander Niki Caro arrives at a time when presidential aspirant Donald Trump is flagrantly fostering anti-immigrant (and specifically anti-Mexican) sentiments among US voters, it bucks a worrisome tide simply by presenting its poor Hispanic characters as something other than parasitic or violent threats to America's wellbeing.

In fact, the movie ridicules such prejudices in a wryly funny early sequence soon after Jim White (Costner) and his family arrive in McFarland, an impoverished southern Californian town whose predominantly Spanish signage and Hispanic population cause one of the White daughters to wonder, "Are we in Mexico?" Having braved a meal in a restaurant with an unfamiliar menu (Jim's shock at the lack of hamburgers is palpable), the Whites enter the parking lot just as a group of young Latino men pull up in low-rider cars. The family flee in terror, with Jim driving over a concrete barrier in order to hasten their getaway.

Of course, Caro's film repeatedly illustrates the foolishness of the Whites' fears. (One of the drivers turns out to be a mechanic, who explains to Jim that he and his friends are too fastidious about their cars' appearance to go looking for trouble.) It also works hard to valorise a community that is generally ignored when not being actively demonised. As the sons and daughters of the working poor, with little chance of upward mobility, Jim's new charges have it particularly rough. In the words of one of his school colleagues, "These kids are invisible, they're expendable. They come from the fields and they go back to the fields, unless the prisons get them first."

*McFarland, USA* shares both an unabashed humanism and a relatively nuanced presentation



Once upon a team: *McFarland, USA*

of an economically disadvantaged community with Caro's breakthrough *Whale Rider* (2002) and its less successful follow-up *North Country* (2005). These traits helps to compensate for the movie's more familiar and perfunctory elements, such as the rote presentation of the training and competition sequences and the speechifying tendency afflicting many of the characters. Thankfully, Costner's coach is a more complex character than sports dramas typically tolerate. There's even the suggestion that his dedication to his runners has a primarily selfish motivation, at least at first. After all, success for the team increases the chances that he'll be hired away by a wealthier school and thus return to the comforts of white middle-class America.

Caro tries to raise the younger characters a notch above the stereotypes that she initially deploys – taciturn teen with family trouble, overweight comic relief, etc. The soundtrack also makes wise use of 1970s funk songs by War and Parliament, plus more Latino-centric choices by Ray Camacho and Mongo Santamaria. Though these selections are largely incongruous with the film's 1980s setting, the resulting surges of energy come in handy whenever *McFarland, USA*'s worthier ambitions cause the pace to slacken. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Ellen Goldsmith-Vein  
Wyck Godfrey  
Lee Stollman  
Marty Bowen  
Joe Hartwick Jr

#### Screenplay

T.S. Nowlin  
Based upon the  
novel by James  
Dashner

#### Director of

Photography

Gyula Pados

#### Film Editor

Dan Zimmerman

#### Production

Designer

Daniel T. Dorrance

#### Music

John Paesano

#### Production

Sound Mixer

Paul Ledford

#### Costume Designer

Sanja Milkovic Hays

#### Visual Effects

Weta Digital Limited

#### Stunt Co-ordinator

George Cottle

©Twentieth

Century Fox Film

Corporation and

TSG Entertainment

Finance LLC

#### Production

Companies

A Temple Hill/

Gotham Group

production

A Twentieth Century

Fox presentation

Made in association

with TSG

Entertainment

Executive

Producers

Wes Ball

T.S. Nowlin

Lindsay Williams

Edward Gamarra

#### Cast

Dylan O'Brien

Thomas

Kaya Scodelario

Teresa

Thomas Brodie-

Sangster

Newt

Dexter Darden

Frypan

Nathalie Emmanuel

Harriet

Giancarlo Esposito

Jorge

Alexander Flores

Winston

Aidan Gillen

Janson

#### Ki Hong Lee

Minho

Jacob Lofland

Aris

Barry Pepper

Vince

Rosa Salazar

Brenda

Lili Taylor

Mary

Alan Tudyk

Blondie

Patricia Clarkson

Ava Paige

#### Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Some screenings

presented in 3D

#### Distributor

20th Century Fox

International (UK)

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Gordon Gray

Mark Ciardi

#### Screenplay

Christopher

Cleveland

Bettina Gilois

Grant Thompson

#### Story

Christopher

Cleveland

Bettina Gilois

#### Director of

Photography

Adam Arkapaw

#### Film Editor

David Coulson

#### Production Designer

Richard Hoover

#### Music

Antonio Pinto

#### Production

Sound Mixer

Ronald Judkins

#### Costume Designer

Sophie de Rakoff

©Disney

Enterprises, Inc.

#### Production

Companies

Disney presents

#### A Mayhem Pictures

production

A Niki Caro film

#### Executive Producers

Mario Isovich

Mary Martin

#### Cast

Kevin Costner

Jim White

Maria Bello

Cheryl White

Morgan Saylor

Julie White

Martha Higareda

Lupe

Michael Aguero

Damacio Diaz

Sergio Avelar

Victor Puentes

Hector Duran

Johnny Samaniego

Rafael Martinez

David Diaz

Johnny Ortiz

Jose Cardenas

Carlos Pratts

Thomas Valles

Ramiro Rodriguez

Danny Diaz

Danny Mora

#### Sammy Rosaldo

Valente Rodriguez

Principal Camillo

Vanessa Martinez

Maria Marsol

Chris Ellis Jr

Coach Jenks

Diana Maria Riva

Señora Diaz

#### Dolby Digital

In Colour

Prints by

Fotokem

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

Buena Vista

International (UK)

Southern California, 1987. Following his dismissal from a school in Idaho over a locker-room incident that caused a student injury, high-school sports coach Jim White relocates with his wife and daughters to McFarland, a town with a predominantly Hispanic population. The Whites feel like outsiders in the impoverished community. Hired as a teacher and assistant football coach at McFarland's high school, Jim soon clashes with the head coach and is relieved of his duties with the team. However, he notices the running skills of several students – the result of their daily trips between school and the fields where they work alongside their families. Despite the sceptical attitude of the school principal, Jim recruits seven students for a cross-country running team. The members include Thomas Valles, who is involved in a burgeoning romance with Jim's elder daughter Julie. After losing their first competition to teams from wealthier schools, the McFarland runners gain confidence and ability under Jim's direction. However, Jim is tempted by a job offer from another school; hearing about this, Thomas criticises him for wanting to abandon the team. Jim, the runners and their families travel to the state championship, where they triumph. Jim declines the other school's offer.

A final scene features the film's real-life subjects describing the continued success of McFarland's running teams.

A dystopian future. Thomas and his companions have been rescued from the Maze, where they survived a cruel experiment that killed many of their friends. They arrive at a base run by Janson, who tells them they are safe. However, Aris, another young man at the base, reveals that they are in danger of being hooked up to a nightmarish laboratory that will harvest their blood for the antibodies it contains. They learn that they alone are immune to the Flare, a disease that turns people into zombies. Thomas and some of the others escape from Janson's base and resolve to find a rebel group living in the mountains. Along the way, they fight zombies and struggle through a harsh desert landscape. They are captured by Jorge and Brenda, outlaws who at first plan to sell them back to Janson but then decide to team up with them. Brenda is bitten by a zombie; they finally locate the rebel camp, where a doctor saves Brenda's life by giving her a serum derived from Thomas's blood. Meanwhile Teresa, Thomas's former love interest, becomes convinced that they should surrender, because she believes their blood can help cure the Flare globally. She radios Janson and he attacks the camp. Thomas's bravery, along with some last-minute help from Jorge, saves the day, but one of the group is captured. Thomas vows to return to Janson's base and rescue his companion.



## Miss You Already

United Kingdom 2015  
Director: Catherine Hardwicke  
Certificate 12A 112m 22s

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

Time was when the cancers featured in mainstream movies were strictly photogenic – particularly if they involved women. Nearly 30 years separate *Love Story* from *Stepmom*, but both heroines' symptoms were restricted to pallid fatigue and dizziness, a tasteful cancer portrait as old as *Dark Victory* (1939).

No punches are pulled, however, in depicting heroine Milly's treatment in the jaunty breast-cancer dramedy *Miss You Already*, as she and lifetime best friend Jess find their bond broken by the weight of her illness. From chemo-induced vomit to unflinching shots of a double mastectomy's surgical wound and its clunking drainage jars, (almost) all is laid bare. Oncologist Robert Clarke once suggested that breast cancer rarely features in movies because it mars cinema's long love affair with naked breasts by presenting the organ as diseased. Yet rather as comedian Tig Notaro did recently when she performed her HBO stand-up show topless to reveal her mastectomy scars, *Miss You Already* gazes steadily at what's left when breasts leave and finds a tender laugh in it: "Come on, Frankentits."

This is probably the film's bravest aspect, since in other respects it's a cheerful and slightly uneven combo of trauma-drama and feelgood friendship story. The depth of Jess and Milly's bond is measured in bubbly, music-backed montages of teen scrapes and girl-power outings, which keep their BFF relationship front and centre. Partners and children are present, even Jacqueline Bisset's crisply flighty granny, but they feel a tad peripheral.

Based on screenwriter Morwenna Banks's radio play *Goodbye* – albeit slightly less spiky than the original – the film is a glossy paean to shared intimacy. Director Catherine Hardwicke, who delivered a fiercely furious portrait of a mother-daughter rift in *Thirteen* (2003), avoids melodrama here, opting for a conventional tears-and-laughter template. She manages to find a poignant, trapping geometry, though, in the film's glass-walled offices and hospital foyers.

While the film's balance of comedy and drama is nimble, the narrative is episodic, and the second-string plot in which Drew Barrymore's faithful Jess undergoes secret IVF



Rude health: Drew Barrymore, Toni Collette

treatment feels too much in service to the main narrative. Barrymore, playing against type as the quieter, cautious one, could have used fewer chiding exchanges and more opportunity to show off her comic chops, largely unused until a panicky labour sequence late on.

Banks, whose background is in comedy writing for TV shows such as *Absolutely*, gives the dialogue the teasing tone of long friendship, and Barrymore and Toni Collette's Milly infuse it with warmth. It's a soft, wry approach that takes few risks with the subject matter. Yet the narrative is unafraid to tilt at the *Stepmom* and cable-movie stereotype of the sainted terminally ill wife and mother. Sideswiped by fear and anger, Milly is a self-pitying, emotionally exploitative 'cancer bully' to Jess, and briefly adulterous to boot.

Collette, who drives the movie along with a naked energy, finds an exuberant humanity in the not-always-likeable Milly, dragging Jess on a whirlwind trip to Bronte country, or berating a birthday party full of bewildered friends. She's equally good at the quiet stuff, transforming that hackneyed cliché, the terminal diagnosis scene, with an eloquently dragged-up grimace that speaks volumes about Milly's denial. The film is at its strongest when its heroine is not going gently into that good night: "If another person looks at me with sad eyes and says 'You look so *well*, I'll projectile vomit.'" 📢

## Mississippi Grind

USA 2014  
Directors: Anna Boden, Ryan Fleck  
Certificate 15 108m 32s

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

It's a canny move for writer-directors Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck to open their fourth collaborative film with an image of a rainbow, since its promise of the proverbial pot of gold suggests a whole spectrum of possibility for those gripped by a gambling habit. Are ad hoc buddies Ryan Reynolds and Ben Mendelsohn doomed by their faith in an entirely illusory payday – or might their quixotic quest to fulfil their dreams yet bring them an against-the-odds reward?

The actors' faces certainly tell very different stories, Reynolds's suave, cheery self-confidence seemingly masking deeper issues in a life spent drifting from casino to casino, while hangdog Mendelsohn's ravaged features speak volumes about a life now in thrall to mounting gambling debts. Those debts are the impetus that sends this jerry-rigged partnership off on a journey to a supposed high-stakes game in New Orleans, a trajectory evidently recalling Robert Altman's venerable slice of gamblers' lives *California Split* (1974), where the same carefree/careworn delineation was played out by Elliott Gould and George Segal.

Boden and Fleck's willingness to let events unfold with a peripatetic lack of urgency shows the degree to which they've taken the Altman influence on board, and they share a similar facility for getting the best out of a cast – right down to single-scene turns from Alfre Woodard's subtly imposing debt collector and Robin Weigert as the ex-wife offering Mendelsohn a frank account of his worthlessness. But whereas Gould's unique ability to register a loosey-goosey joie de vivre made sense of his role in the Altman film, Reynolds is just too effortful to bring off a similar effect this time round. There's something about his commitment-phobic, slightly smug loner that doesn't add up, leaving Mendelsohn – fully deserving a US lead after eye-catching supporting roles in the likes of *The Place Beyond the Pines* (2012) – as the key point of audience identification. He's absolutely convincing as a career loser, but the story isn't played as a familiar cautionary tale – instead, his scrappy little feller's seeming inability to stop himself getting in deeper and deeper merely intensifies our sympathies for him. Boden and Fleck perhaps



The dice storm: Ryan Reynolds

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Christopher Simon  
**Written by**  
Morwenna Banks  
**Director of Photography**  
Elliot Davis  
**Editor**  
Phillip J. Bartell  
**Production Designer**  
Amanda McArthur  
**Music**  
Harry Gregson-Williams  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Kieron Wolfson  
**Costume Designer**  
Claire Finlay  
Thompson

New Sparta  
Films presents in  
association with  
The Salt Company  
an S Films production  
**Executive Producers**  
Jerome booth  
Nicki Hattingh  
Sheryl Crown  
Anne Sheehan  
Samantha Horley  
James Norrie  
Barnaby Southcombe  
Lisa Lambert  
Celine Rattray  
Trudie Styler  
Catherine Hardwicke  
Morwenna Banks  
Paul Andrew Williams

**Cast**  
Toni Collette  
Milly

**Drew Barrymore**  
Jess  
**Paddy Considine**  
Jago  
**Dominic Cooper**  
Kit  
**Tyson Ritter**  
Ace  
**Honor Kneafsey**  
Scarlett  
**Ryan Baker**  
Ben  
**Frances De La Tour**  
Jill, the wigmaker  
**Jacqueline Bisset**  
Miranda

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
**Distributor**  
E1 Films

London, present day. Extrovert young mother Milly is diagnosed with breast cancer. Her lifelong best friend Jess supports her through chemotherapy and its travails, while secretly undergoing IVF treatment. Jess becomes pregnant just as Milly has a double mastectomy, but keeps this a secret while giving Milly post-operative help. Milly becomes sexually and emotionally distanced from her husband Kit and has a fling with barman Ace. She drags Jess to Yorkshire for a 'bucket list' trip to Bronte country, though her real motive turns out to be a tryst with Ace. Jess discovers this, reveals her pregnancy and breaks off their friendship owing to Milly's selfishness. A fall on the moors endangers her pregnancy.

Some months later, Milly's cancer has spread. She and Jess reconcile. Jess's labour starts early, while her partner Jago is away working on an oil rig. Milly's mother smuggles Milly from her hospice to the delivery room to be Jess's birth partner. Weeks later, Milly dies in the hospice in Jess's arms.

©S Films (MYA) Ltd  
**Production Companies**



## The Nightmare

USA/United Kingdom 2015

Director: Rodney Ascher

Certificate 15 86m 44s



Grim sleeper: *The Nightmare*

### Reviewed by Roger Clarke

With more in common with a portmanteau horror movie than a conventional documentary, Rodney Ascher's *The Nightmare* explores an ancient dread that's still alive among its many modern-day sufferers – 'sleep paralysis' and its concomitant evil twin, 'night terrors'. Sleep clinics all over the developed world are familiar with incidences of people who essentially enter a horror film when they go to sleep – one that involves muscle paralysis and alarming hallucinations, a sense of inchoate evil and a feeling of struggling to breathe. (This sensation of being asphyxiated provides the origin of the word 'nightmare' – the Old English 'mære' means a goblin that squats, suffocatingly, on the chest.) Sufferers are seized by ineffectual

but vivid panic – some fear that they are having a stroke or even that they have died.

This invasion, this nocturnal capture, especially of women, has often had a sexual aspect. In past centuries it was associated with demonic attacks and witchcraft, though Ascher's film doesn't touch on this. Pointedly, he doesn't look much at modern science, either. No, Ascher is all for the visuals, and visually this is the liminal world of Goya etchings and the paintings of Henry Fuseli (whose influential and sexualised 1781 work *The Nightmare* caused a sensation when it was first displayed in public, and fed straight into *Frankenstein*). It's also the visual world of Hollywood and Freddy Krueger.

Ascher, who gave us the fine Kubrickian documentary *Room 237* (2012), relishes the opportunity for staged horror stunts, which sometimes – and this is troubling – feel at odds with the genuine suffering of the interviewees, who occasionally complain that their condition isn't taken seriously. Individuals from across the US (and a deep-sea diver from Manchester) prove mostly intelligent, warm and amusing company – yet it's clear that some are very damaged by their persistent and exhausting experiences. This raises some ethical questions over the whole documentary, which at times comes perilously close to feasting on the freakish sufferings of others. Some of the interviewees describe disturbing accounts of their visions – a woman effectively raped by an invisible entity, for example; a former comics-shop owner having his genitals mashed by a silvery metal instrument. (This last sufferer expects that his visions will one day kill him.) Many of the hallucinations people describe – of 3D shadows with burning red eyes, or visitants like alien 'Greys' – are surprisingly universal and reported all over the world. Others seem deeply personal and frankly psychosexual.

If it weren't for the director weighing in with his own experience of the condition halfway through the movie, there would be a great deal of valid criticism of his methods. Yet he's absolutely right that it's a fascinating subject, the way a little-known medical phenomenon has informed many Hollywood horror movies. This is a film intended to entertain rather than inform, and though there's nothing wrong with that, the fact that the tired and harrowed Mancunian diver doesn't seem to realise there's help available on the NHS is deeply troubling. Unhelpful to the afflicted then, but probably fascinating to the easy-sleeper. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Tom Rice  
Ben Nearn  
Jamie Patricof  
Lynette Howell

#### Written by

Anna Boden  
Ryan Fleck

#### Cinematography

Andrij Parekh

#### Editor

Anna Boden

#### Production Designer

Jade Healy

#### Original Music

Scott Bomar

#### Production Sound Mixer

Dick Hansen

#### Costume Designer

Abby O'Sullivan

#### ©MG SP, LLC

#### Production Companies

Sycamore Pictures  
presents an Electric  
City Entertainment  
production in

association with  
Gowanus Projections

A film by Ryan Fleck

& Anna Boden

Produced in

association with

Story Ink

#### Executive Producers

John Leshner

Randall Emmett

George Furla

Jeremy Kipp Walker

#### Cast

Ryan Reynolds

Curtis

Ben Mendelsohn

Gerry

Sienna Miller

Simone

Analeigh Tipton

Vanessa

Alfre Woodard

Sam

James Toback

Tony Roundtree

Robin Weigert

Dorothy

#### Dolby Digital

#### In Colour

#### Colour by

Technicolor-

PostWorks

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

E1 Films

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Ross M. Dinerstein

Glen Zipper

#### Director of Photography

Bridger Nielson

#### Edited by

Rodney Ascher

#### Production Designers

Ben Spiegelman

Evan Ross Murphy

#### Music

Jonathan Snipes

#### Sound

Jonathan Snipes

#### Costume Designer

Courtney Arthur

#### ©Sleep Movie, LLC

#### Production Companies

Content Media

Corporation

presents a Zipper

Brothers, Campfire

production in

association with

Highland Park

Classics, Wake

Media, New City

Road a Rodney

Ascher film

Produced

by Ambient

Productions Limited

#### Executive Producers

Jamie Carmichael

Kevin Iwashina

Ralph Zipper

#### In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

Altitude Film

Distribution

Dubuque, Iowa, present day. At a poker game in a local casino, drifter Curtis strikes up a rapport with seasoned gambler Gerry. Curtis's seemingly carefree attitude contrasts with Gerry's desperation in the face of huge gambling debts. The two men decide to travel together to New Orleans, where a high-stakes poker game run by legendary gambler Tony Roundtree offers Gerry the chance of a big win. En route they visit Curtis's sometime girlfriend Simone, a prostitute working the Mississippi river boats. Curtis, we learn, dreams of one day visiting Machu Picchu. Simone's colleague Vanessa is attracted to Gerry, who opens up to her about his separation from his wife and daughter. When the men leave, Gerry insists on a detour to Little Rock, where his ex-wife Dorothy, now remarried, remains bitter about his lack of contact with their daughter. Gerry steals some money from Dorothy and a photograph of the girl before making a hasty retreat.

Arriving in New Orleans, Gerry falls out with Curtis when they lose money at a racetrack. Alone, he seeks out a sceptical Roundtree, who greets him with a punch. Gerry returns to the casino, where he finds Curtis, and hits a winning streak shooting dice. The next morning, Curtis finds his share of the money in the safe, marked 'Machu Picchu'. Gerry drives off, carrying his daughter's photograph.

A documentary with stylised elements, in which eight individuals – seven from the US and one from the UK – are quizzed about their experience of 'sleep paralysis'. These interviews are augmented with dramatic recreations and short bursts of animation.

Sufferers of classic sleep paralysis experience muscle atonia, a perception of shadowy presences accompanied by a feeling of evil and threat, and sometimes out-of-body sensations. Halfway through the film, director Rodney Ascher reveals that he himself experiences sleep paralysis. We see extracts from films including 'Insidious' (2010) and 'Nightmare on Elm Street' (1984), which are considered to be deeply informed by sleep-paralysis lore; the resemblance of this state to alien abduction stories is also considered. Two of the interviewees believe the phenomenon is supernatural; others describe a sexual aspect to the experience. Ascher also briefly looks at the lively online self-help groups run by the afflicted, and the curious global universality of many of their visions.



## The Program

France/United Kingdom/Luxembourg 2015

Director: Stephen Frears

Certificate 15 103m 6s

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Probably the most spectacular fall from grace in recent sporting history, the downfall of American cyclist Lance Armstrong, quondam record-holding seven-times winner of the Tour de France (until his wins were stripped from him in 2012), has been extensively told, most notably in *Sunday Times* sportswriter David Walsh's book *Seven Deadly Sins: My Pursuit of Lance Armstrong* and Alex Gibney's documentary *The Armstrong Lie* (2013). It's on Walsh's book that *The Program* is based, and even though the outcome will surely be known to almost everyone who sees it, Stephen Frears's film tells its story with a brio that keeps it taut and consistently watchable.

Walsh, Armstrong's nemesis, shows up almost at the start of the film in a scene that tells us a lot about the cyclist's devious nature – even at a friendly game of Subbuteo with a sympathetic journalist, he instinctively pulls underhand tricks (such as distracting his opponent) to make sure he wins. As Armstrong, Ben Foster (who played William Burroughs in 2013's *Kill Your Darlings*) channels something of George C. Scott's fixed, dangerous stare and manic grin as General 'Buck' Turgidson in *Dr Strangelove* (1964), conveying a man to whom moral conventions are a tiresome irrelevance. Foster's performance, though, is offset by that of Chris O'Dowd as Walsh; he's easygoing on first acquaintance, but his amiable smile and soft Irish tones conceal an obsession and a persistence to match that of his quarry.

Even before that, though, Frears kicks off with an image capturing both the excitement of cycle-racing and the grandiose solipsism of his antihero: a lone cyclist toiling up a mountain road against a panorama of scudding clouds and snow-capped peaks – and then, still glamorously solo, hurtling down the other side around suicidal bends, the camera excitedly hugging his shoulder. It's a striking contrast to the black-and-white newsreel footage we're then shown of narrow roads clogged with hundreds of frantically pedalling contenders, often crashing together in bone-crunching mass pile-ups: the romantic image of the Tour de France versus the messy reality.

Those with no great interest in cycle-racing as a sport can be reassured – *The Program* doesn't inflict any lengthy race sequences on us. Frears and his screenwriter John Hodge are far more concerned with the hysterical hype and hoopla surrounding the Tour, and with the dynamic between Armstrong and those around him, most of whom he sets out to dominate as a matter of course. Not surprisingly, it's an intensely masculine world. Armstrong's meeting with his soon-to-be-wife (in the antiseptic surroundings of a hotel corridor) is followed almost immediately by his wedding, after which we hear virtually nothing of his married life, not even how his wife reacted to his disgrace. Far more central to the action is the edgy relationship between him and his younger teammate Floyd Landis (Jesse Plemons). Landis, personally recruited by Armstrong, flattered by the attention and seduced like all his associates by the promise of glory, goes along with the doping, but misgivings stemming from his religious background (he comes from a Mennonite community in Pennsylvania) and his resentment at Armstrong's brash, bullying tactics



Cycle of deceit: Ben Foster

lead to a growing rift, and when the shit hits the fan, Landis is among those who denounce him.

Given recent revelations about Fifa and the IAAF, it hardly comes as any surprise when it's made clear that Armstrong, operating in an overall culture of corruption and blind eyes being turned, felt he could rely on official complicity in his cheating – or that Walsh, in his single-minded determination to ferret out the truth, incurred the hostility not only of Armstrong and the sport's governing body, but even of his fellow journalists, who treat him as a party-pooper. At one point, contemptuously refused a seat in his colleagues' limo, he's left dejectedly trying to flag down a cab back to his hotel.

What's less expected is that, thanks partly to Hodge's intelligent script and Foster's empathetic

performance, Armstrong finally comes across – for all his lying, arrogance and psychopathic behaviour – as a surprisingly pitiable figure. Sometimes even comic: while recuperating from his surgery for testicular cancer and furiously trying to get back into shape, he's mortified to be overtaken on a hill by a plump girl on a bog-standard push-bike. But ultimately, in his driven, savage desperation to be the winner of all time, and in his refusal to accept that it's all fallen apart (“I still feel I won those races,” he blusters at the end), there's something perversely tragic about him. Over the final credits we hear the elegiac tones of Leonard Cohen's 'Everybody Knows': “Everybody knows that the boat is leaking. Everybody knows that the captain lied...” Everybody, it seems, except Lance Armstrong. 📺

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Tim Bevan  
Eric Fellner  
Tracey Seaward  
Kate Solomon

#### Screenplay

John Hodge  
Inspired by the book *Seven Deadly Sins: My Pursuit of Lance Armstrong* by David Walsh

#### Director of Photography

Danny Cohen

#### Editor

Valerio Bonelli

#### Production Designer

Alan Macdonald

#### Music

Alex Heffes

#### Production

Sound Mixer

Peter Lindsay

#### Costume Designer

Jane Petrie

@StudioCanal S.A.

#### Production Companies

StudioCanal presents in association with Anton Capital Entertainment and Amazon Prime Instant Video a Working

#### Title production

A Stephen Frears film

#### Executive Producers

Amelia Granger  
Liza Chasin  
Olivier Courson  
Ron Halpern

#### Cast

Ben Foster  
Lance Armstrong

#### Chris O'Dowd

David Walsh  
Guillaume Canet  
Dr Michele Ferrari  
Jesse Plemons  
Floyd Landis  
Lee Pace  
Bill Stapleton  
Denis Ménochet  
Johan Bruyneel  
Edward Hogg  
Frankie Andreu

#### Dustin Hoffman

Bob Hamman

#### In Colour

[1.85:1]

#### Part-subtitled

#### Distributor

Studiocanal Limited

In 1993, American cyclist Lance Armstrong is the youngest rider in the Tour de France. Driven by intense ambition, he notes the success of a team whose medical adviser is Italian doctor Michele Ferrari. He contacts Ferrari, who dismissively tells him that his body shape is wrong. Encouraged by their Belgian manager Johan Bruyneel, Armstrong and his teammates embark on a gruelling programme of training, fuelled by drugs, especially red-blood-cell booster erythropoietin (EPO). They start winning, but then Armstrong is diagnosed with testicular cancer. He undergoes major surgery and recovers, but is dropped by his sponsors and his contract is terminated. Fighting his way back to form, he establishes a new team sponsored by the US Postal Service and advised by Ferrari.

'Sunday Times' journalist David Walsh, who's

been following Armstrong's career, is convinced that the athlete takes drugs but can't convince his editor to run the story. Amid huge acclaim, Armstrong wins the 1999 Tour de France. He goes on to win six more times, becoming a national hero in the US and setting up a cancer-research charity, Livestrong. In 2002, new recruit Floyd Landis joins the team; Landis's religious upbringing causes him qualms of conscience at Armstrong's bullying methods and drug-fuelled regime. After his 2005 win, Armstrong announces his retirement, but in 2009 attempts a comeback, finishing third in the Tour.

Walsh's dogged research results in a 'Sunday Times' exposé; Armstrong sues the paper and wins, but in 2012 the US Anti-Doping Agency publishes a report accusing Armstrong of drug-taking and strips him of his Tour victories.



## Red Army

Director: Gabe Polsky  
Certificate 15 84m 27s

### Reviewed by Sukhdev Sandhu

*Red Army* starts off unpromisingly: shots of Ronald Reagan spouting Cold War, Manichean clichés; portentously symphonic music; antsy, ADD cutting. It's hard not to think about the infinitely more rueful and sophisticated ways in which Romanian directors such as Cristian Mungiu and Constantin Popescu – most notably in *Tales from the Golden Age* (2009) – have animated the ironies and paradoxes of communist culture.

Fortunately, director Gabe Polsky, the son of Russian immigrants and a hockey player at Yale, has a personal relationship with his subject, which helps him to settle down and tell a rich and highly engaging set of stories. One of these is about how Stalin saw ice hockey as a tool to rebrand his nation and challenge America's sporting dominion. Another is about the visionary tactics of coach Anatoli Tarasov, who revolutionised the sport and incubated a generation of extraordinary players. Yet another is about Viktor Tikhonov, an imperious army general hired as coach by the chief of the KGB, who treated his players like prisoners but, bar a famous defeat to the Americans in the 1980 Winter Olympics, steered them to global supremacy in the decades before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Polsky's film, perhaps without meaning to, reveals the conceptual shortcomings of western sports commentators. Time and again, journalists past and present talk about how the stern, humourless Soviets viewed ice hockey as military strategy, as scientific planning. The archival footage suggests otherwise: Tarasov was creatively flexible and forward-thinking enough to seek advice from chess grandmaster Anatoly Karpov, and to have his players study the movements of Bolshoi dancers. They're shown dashing on to and off walls with the graceful aplomb of free runners. Clearly units can be as beguiling to watch as individuals, and collectivity can be as stylish or singular as solo turns.

The archive footage, of which there could have been even more, bears this out. The Russians' stickwork is breathtaking. They have a seemingly telepathic awareness of each other's presence. Their movement on or off the puck is as dazzling as a Busby Berkeley routine. In the weaving ease with which they move between defence and attack, their all-round spatial savvy and the subtlety with which they approach build-up play, they resemble an ice-hockey version of the mid-1970s Dutch national soccer team that developed a still-celebrated brand of 'Total Football'.

For a while, as it documents the years immediately after the break-up of the Soviet Union, when the players headed for the American



Of ice and men: *Red Army*

National Hockey League, *Red Army* threatens to become a horror movie. The Russian artists are confronted not only by the selfishness of the American style of play, but by its violence; their rivals, often egged on by xenophobic fans, bristle with elbows-out swagger and are eager to fight. The Russians, sometimes reluctant expatriates, come across as a rare species on the brink of being wiped out by a brutal and estranging culture.

The film's star is defenceman Slava Fetisov. He grew up in a crowded apartment with no toilet or running water and went on to become the heart of the Russian team that took the sport to another dimension. Later, in spite of many inducements, he refused to defect to North America, but was nevertheless ostracised by Tikhonov who, more aligned with the realpolitik machinations of the state, tried to get him jailed. Made a minister for sport by Vladimir Putin, Fetisov can be cocksure (he interrupts an interview to scroll through text messages). But like his teammates, he can also be reflective and prone to long pauses, during which the heaviness of the history he's been burdened with is palpable.

As for modern Russia, these players – who, as one of them says, "pissed blood" for a nation they believed in – appear mystified by the soulless commercialism they find there today. Now, far more than when they moved to America, they are aliens. ☹

## Sicario

USA 2015  
Director: Denis Villeneuve  
Certificate 15 121m 11s

See Feature  
on page 40

### Reviewed by Samuel Wigley

Denis Villeneuve's drugs-war thriller *Sicario* opens in heart-stopping fashion with a raid on a house near Phoenix, Arizona. What FBI agent Kate Macer (an excellent Emily Blunt) and her Swat team find there recalls the horrific revelations of serial-killer movies – including the behind-closed-doors horrors of *Prisoners* (2013), Villeneuve's last collaboration with ace cinematographer Roger Deakins. Like that film, *Sicario* (which takes its title from the Mexican word for 'hitman') induces a sense of cold-sweat anxiety as it asks moral questions about the extent to which tactics beyond the limits of the law can be justified.

Kate soon finds herself enlisted into a task force devoted to bringing to justice drug lord Diaz, head of the cartel behind these and many other killings. It's a mission that takes them over the Tex-Mex border and back again – by private plane, through tunnel or via road crossing – as often as it finds them vacillating between zones of legality and lawlessness. Our questioning point of identification, Kate is an unusually passive protagonist: a sceptical back-seat passenger on a turbulently immoral thrill ride. Her flip-flop-wearing senior Matt (Josh Brolin) takes evident pleasure in keeping her in the dark as he repeatedly pulls the rug from under her feet.

*Sicario* ramps up early on with a clandestine foray into the dangerous border city of Juárez, where drugs-war casualties can be seen hanging from an overpass as Kate peers wide-eyed through a car window. In a blisteringly taut sequence that doubles as a smash-and-grab on Michael Mann's dominion of electrifying action, the crack team careers through the city's dusty streets, busts a guy out of prison for extradition, then gets stuck in a huge traffic jam crossing back through passport control to El Paso.

It's thrillingly shot, but something lingers after the tension of the ensuing shootout with a carload of Mexicans: a sense that this tour through south-of-the-border otherness has been glibly fine-tuned to frighten. Though we're saved the yellowed desert-vision tinting that denotes Mexico in US dramas even of the order of *Traffic* (2000) and TV's *Breaking Bad*, Villeneuve's film will not be the one to temper America's paranoia about its Hispanic neighbour. ➡



Law and border: Victor Garber, Emily Blunt

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Gabe Polsky

#### Written by

Gabe Polsky

#### Cinematography

Peter Zeitlinger

Svetlana Cvetko

#### Editors

Eli Despres

Kurt Engfhr

#### Music

Christophe Beck

Leo Birenberg

#### Supervising

Sound Editor/

Sound Designer

E.J. Holowicki

#### Production

Company

A Gabriel Polsky

production

#### Executive Producers

Jerry Weintraub

Werner Herzog

Liam Satri-Meloy

#### In Colour

[L78:1]

#### Part-subtitled

#### Distributor

Curzon Film World

A documentary looking back at the rise and decline of the 'Red Army', the Soviet national ice hockey team that was designed to advertise the strength and superiority of the communist way of life. Interviews with former players – punctuated by archival footage and contributions from sports journalists and a former KGB employee – reveal the long road to international success, followed by the exodus of star players to North America in the 1990s.



**S** *Sicario* offers neither the scope nor the depth to give more than a broad-brush picture of the war on drugs and how the violence and corruption have spread upwards beyond the Rio Grande. There's nothing to balance out its vision of Mexico as a no-go zone where drugs wars rage and fire must be fought with fire.

Central to this nihilistic thrust is Benicio Del Toro's wolfish operative Alejandro, a key on-the-ground adviser in Matt's team who has his own vengeful motivation for bringing Diaz to ground. It's Alejandro who shuts down Kate's protests at their above-the-law tactics by likening ending the cartels' reign of terror to discovering a vaccine – voicing the troubling thesis of this ambiguous film that certain lengths are worth going to. By making Alejandro's ultimate act of retribution its climax and leaving Kate on the sidelines, Villeneuve's movie arguably squanders its final act with a moment that has little of the hard-earned cathartic energy found in similarly Jacobean scenes in *Breaking Bad*.

Regardless, in common with the director's other films, including *Incendies* (2010) and *Enemy* (2013), there's an energy and visual panache to *Sicario* that make for compulsive viewing. Special credit must go to Deakins's cinematography, with its sharp framing and flattening aerial compositions of the parched desert landscapes, while the clamorous, dark-ambient rumbles of Jóhannsson's score are brutally effective. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Basil Iwanyk  
Edward L. McDonnell  
Molly Smith  
Thad Luckinbill  
Trent Luckinbill  
**Written by**  
Taylor Sheridan  
**Director of Photography**  
Roger Deakins  
**Editor**  
Joe Walker  
**Production Designer**  
Patrice Vermette  
**Music**  
Jóhann Jóhannsson  
**Sound Mixer**  
William Sarokin  
**Costume Designer**  
Renée April

**@Black Label Media, LLC**  
**Production Companies**  
Lionsgate and Black Label Media present a Thunder Road production  
**Executive Producers**  
John H. Starke  
Erica Lee  
Ellen H. Schwartz

**Cast**  
Emily Blunt  
Kate Maser  
Benicio Del Toro  
Alejandro  
Josh Brolin  
Matt Graver  
Victor Garber

Dave Jennings  
**Jon Bernthal**  
Ted  
Daniel Kaluuya  
Reggie Wayne  
Jeffrey Donovan  
Steve Forsing  
Raoul Trujillo  
Rafael  
Julio César Cedillo  
Fausto Alarcon  
Bernardo Saracino  
Manuel Diaz

**Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]**  
**Part-subtitled**

**Distributor**  
Lionsgate UK

Arizona, the present. FBI agent Kate is involved in a raid on a home owned by the Diaz drug cartel, where bodies are found hidden in the walls. Kate is subsequently recruited by a secret task force committed to bringing Diaz to justice. She is sceptical about the team's methods, and is especially suspicious of team member Alejandro, a shadowy figure who, it is later revealed, is out to avenge Diaz's murder of his family. Kate and the team fly illegally into Juárez to spring a Mexican drug lord from prison and return him to the US. They are ambushed, but succeed in obtaining information from their prisoner about the whereabouts of a tunnel used for drug trafficking. Alejandro saves Kate from being killed during a flirtation with a corrupt American policeman in league with the cartels. Following the movement of drug mules through the tunnel leads Alejandro to Diaz, whom he assassinates. Later he confronts Kate, making her swear to keep silent about the operation.

## Sinister 2

United Kingdom/USA 2015

Director: Ciarán Foy

Certificate 15 96m 57s

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

A problem with this sequel to Scott Derrickson's successful shocker *Sinister* (2012) is that the solution to the mystery of the first film – which was revealed slowly and effectively – is so complicated it takes half the running time for returning screenwriters Derrickson (who doesn't direct this time around, having gone on to *Doctor Strange*) and C. Robert Cargill to get up to speed with where we were when we left off.

James Ransone returns from the first film but his character still isn't named, and his major function until a burst of heroism at the finish is trying to explain just what the demon Bughuul is up to here. There's too much time to ponder how contrived it all is – especially the way an ancient demon relies on relatively recent but outmoded technology (home movies, ham radio) to spread his evil influence. Shannyn Sossamon gives a fine, haunted performance as runaway wife Courtney who doesn't yet realise that her brutal husband isn't the worst monster around, but she's kept out of the loop of the plot for too long – it's perhaps a problem that her fear of her smugly tyrannical spouse feels more real and deep-rooted than the business with the death-spreading demon who's the main attraction of the movie.

The changed dynamic of the narrative shifts attention from the perplexed parent of the latest child to fall under the demon's random curse to the children who see and interact with ghosts and demons mostly invisible to adults. It seems that Courtney's milder, more sensitive son Dylan (Robert Sloan), who is bullied by his aggressive brother Zach, is being recruited into the pack of evil ghost kids – they invite him to watch the nasty 'home movies' of previous killings, which have titles such as 'Christmas Morning' (a family buried alive in freezing snow) and 'Gone Fishing' (a family hung upside down over a swamp infested with hungry, snapping alligators). There's a neat chill as Zach (Dartanian Sloan)

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Jason Blum  
Scott Derrickson  
**Written by**  
Scott Derrickson  
C. Robert Cargill  
Based on characters created by Scott Derrickson, C. Robert Cargill  
**Director of Photography**  
Amy Vincent  
**Edited by**  
Michael Trent  
Timothy Alverson  
**Production Designer**  
Bill Boes

**Music**  
tomandandy  
**Sound Mixer**  
David Obermeyer  
**Costume Designer**  
Stephani Lewis  
**@Alliance Films (UK)**  
*Sinister 2* Limited  
**Production Companies**  
Entertainment One presents in association with IM Global a Blumhouse and Tank Caterpillar production  
**Executive Producers**  
Brian Kavanaugh-

Jones  
Charles Layton  
Couper Samuelson  
Xavier Marchand  
**Cast**  
James Ransone  
Ex-Deputy So & So  
Shannyn Sossamon  
Courtney Collins  
Lea Coco  
Clint Collins  
Dartanian Sloan  
Zach Collins  
Robert Sloan  
Dylan Collins  
Tate Ellington  
Dr Stomberg

**John Beasley**  
Father Rodriguez  
**Lucas Jade Zumann**  
Milo  
**Jaden Klein**  
Ted  
**Laila Haley**  
Emma  
**Caden Marshall Fritz**  
Peter  
**Olivia Rainey**  
Catherine  
**Nick King**  
Bughuul  
**Michael Woods**  
the Creeper  
**Tory O. Davis**  
security guard  
**Howie Johnson**

State Trooper  
Shermer  
**Grace Holuby**  
Stomberg's daughter  
**John Mountain**  
Christmas father  
**Nicole Santini**  
Christmas mother  
**Stephen Varga**  
Christmas son  
**Skylar McClure**  
Christmas daughter  
**Ethan Hawke**  
Ellison Oswalt  
**Juliet Rylance**  
Tracy Oswalt  
**Michael Hall D'Addario**  
Trevor

**Claire Foley**  
Ashley  
**Victoria Leigh Morales**  
Stephanie

**Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]**

**Distributor**  
E1 Films



The turn of the pew: Robert Sloan

tells Dylan that he can see the ghosts too and is eager to be chosen as the murderer, evoking the private world of monstrous children that has been a regular horror locale since *The Turn of the Screw* (*The Other* and *Children of the Corn* are touchstones here). But once the trap has been sprung, the finale is hurried and the characters who've seemed to be our viewpoints – Courtney and Dylan – are tied to poles with hoods over their heads as others resolve the plot for them.

Irish director Ciarán Foy, who made an outstanding horror short *The Faeries of Blackheath Woods* (2006) and the tower-block/demon-hoodie drama *Citadel* (2012), eases into American franchise-style fear with this assignment. He stages incidental creepiness well, such as a sequence where the deputy is stalked by shadow-children who disappear when torchlight is cast on them but return in greater numbers when he directs the beam elsewhere, and turns the *Sinister* films' signature snuff home movies into unsettling, blackly humorous set pieces. Nevertheless, this seems more like a footnote than a follow-up, and the mouthless, frock-coated, wild-haired Bughuul (Nick King) looks more like a dissipated member of Kiss than a prospective candidate for the boogeyman hall of fame. **S**

and is eager to kill his brother and parents. An ex-deputy – who was associated with author Ellison Oswalt, a previous victim of Bughuul – has been trying to avert the curse by burning down the homes where Bughuul is likely to strike. He locates the church and warns Courtney of the danger but can't prevent Clint reclaiming his wife and children – which prompts Zach to begin Bughuul's ritual. After Clint is sacrificed, the deputy intervenes, smashing the 8mm camera that is essential to the ritual and saving Courtney and Dylan. Thwarted, Bughuul disintegrates Zach.

# The Sound of Fury

United Kingdom 2015  
Directors: Alan Byron, Mark Sloper

## Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Classic-album-played-in-full reunion tours, 180g vinyl reissues, West End oldies revues and tie-in documentaries: all revenue streams emptying into the sea of rock-nostalgia big business that leaves no artist unrevived. Take the case of Billy Fury, the Liverpudlian rocker who charted 29 times in his career, mostly between 1959 and 1966, whose songbook has recently been rifled through on stage in *Be Bop a Lula!* and who is now given the bio-doc treatment in *The Sound of Fury*. Alan Byron and Mark Sloper's documentary isn't the first to tell Fury's story; I haven't seen *Billy Fury: Halfway to Paradise* (a 1998 BBC *Omnibus* programme) or *Billy Fury: His Wondrous Story*, so can't draw comparisons – though it's difficult to imagine that either is saddled with interstitial graphics nearly so unsightly as those employed in *The Sound of Fury*.

Byron and Sloper's film is a standard melange of talking-head interviews and archival footage. In the former department, the filmmakers have corralled an impressive line-up that includes family (Billy's mum Jean, his brother Albie, who died four years ago), contemporaries who worked the gruelling tour circuit alongside Billy (Vince Eager, Joe Brown), musicians influenced by Fury (Jimmy Page, Alvin Stardust, Imelda May) and various presenters and commentators (Spencer Leigh, Len Goodman, Mark Kermode). Billy himself occasionally chimes in via tape-recorded interviews, recalling, among other things, copying his haircut from Eddie Cochran in Frank Tashlin's *The Girl Can't Help It* (1956). As for the archival excavation, it's mostly standard-issue stock footage, including grim images of sooty, pre-rock-'n'-roll Liverpool, frugging kids and screaming teenage girls, with some home-movie scenes of Billy fondling his beloved pets or smoking his equally beloved spliffs on holiday in the West Indies. (He is better represented in still photographs, having graced the pages of a great many teen mags.) There are also clips of him in action that stay on screen for any amount of time, accompanied by an analysis



You're swell: Billy Fury

of his particular loose-limbed stage presence.

The material is bound into thematic bundles, beginning naturally enough with a recollection of Billy's boyhood, continuing with a discussion of the arrival in Britain of rock 'n' roll (including proto-rock developments such as skiffle) and then spending the lion's share of time on Billy's years of chart dominance. The focus shifts between the public and private Billy: various commentators rhapsodise about the banged-out-in-a-day LP *The Sound of Fury* (one of them, Boz Boorer, the long-time touring guitarist for Morrissey, placed Fury's face on the sleeve of the 1987 Smiths single 'Last Night I Dreamt That Somebody Loved Me'), while former romantic partners recall the singer's extraordinary detachment – which was, naturally, irresistible.

This checklist approach ticks off all the boxes, though it makes for a lurching progression from one point to the next rather than a fluid timeline, and the clunkiness is exacerbated by the choppy sound mix. The technical roughness is surprising, given that Byron's previous credits include *John Lennon: Love Is All You Need* (2010), *Keep on Burning: The Story of Northern Soul* (2012) and, with Sloper, *Punk '76* (2013). He is also – and I'm not making this up – the creator of *Margaret Thatcher: The Iron Lady* and *Queen Elizabeth II: The Diamond Celebration* (both 2012).

"It wasn't like today," Page is heard to say of the period when American rock albums were contraband in Britain, "You had to really search this stuff out." Such fervour is no longer required for fandom, and a half-assed job like *The Sound of Fury* is the sort of thing that results when the only passion behind a project is a desire to stoke the content fires. God save the music doc! 📺

# Suffragette

United Kingdom/USA/France 2015  
Director: Sarah Gavron  
Certificate 12A 106m 4s

See Feature  
on page 32

## Reviewed by Kate Stables

Ask most people about the portrayal of suffragettes in film and you'd be lucky to get a chirpy couplet from the comic *Mary Poppins* anthem 'Sister Suffragette': "We're clearly soldiers in petticoats/ Dauntless crusaders for women's votes." So Sarah Gavron's solid, skilful and unabashedly stirring story of the doughty pre-WWI activism of the militant WSPU (Women's Social and Political Union), concentrated in the fictional figure of East End laundress Maud Watts, arrives not a moment too soon. Taking as its motto 'Deeds Not Words' (the slogan embroidered on WSPU banners), it's an almost self-consciously *active* film, keen to establish the suffragette movement as gender war-war rather than committee jaw-jaw. Accordingly, Maud's journey from dutiful wife and worker to activist outcast is traced in a tense, well-dramatised series of confrontations and violent encounters. Starting in March 1912, as Emmeline Pankhurst incites her followers to rebellion, it erupts in an unexpected flurry of broken glass with the West End window-smashing campaign that Maud stumbles into, propelling her thereafter through violent demonstrations, bombings and brutal imprisonments.

This pulse-quickening parade of direct action, told with its tough truths intact, is confident and compelling. Its grit illustrates how WSPU suffragettes were freedom fighters like *Selma's* marchers, their force-fed incarcerations as brutal as *Hunger's* on-the-blanket brotherhood. In *Norma Rae*-style, the film also laudably highlights the grim lives of sweated female labour in the steam laundries, including everything from deadly scalds to sexual assault. But *Suffragette*, with its relentlessly message-driven narrative, seems schematic and a little over-manufactured in its dedication to capturing the cause.

Maud's composite character is based on working-class suffragettes such as the socialist Hannah Mitchell. That said, she's carefully constructed to carry the viewer's sympathy as she passes from mild horror at suffragette audacity to participation in every headline-generating WSPU action. After she has dynamited postboxes, been told "Never surrender!" by Meryl Streep's Mrs Pankhurst, blown up Lloyd George's empty second home and accompanied Emily Davison on her ill-fated Derby mission, a faintly *Zelig* quality sets in, despite the film's urgent drama. Abi Morgan's highly crafted script also winds in a heart-rending domestic subplot, in which Maud's gentle husband Sonny (a subtly shamed Ben Whishaw) severs her from her home and adored small son George, in some of the film's most affecting scenes. Battered but unbowed by police hunts, prison and patriarchy, she seems the very essence of the oppressed, the Job of 'Mrs Pankhurst's undesirables', as the newspapers dub the suffragettes. Even the dialogue is burnished till it forms inspiring quotes, as when Maud flashes her defiance at Brendan Gleeson's calm, avuncular police inspector: "War's the only language men listen to."

Fine stuff but it's missing the resonance of a real life – the dash of Morgan's *The Iron Lady* (2011), the ambiguities of *The Invisible* 📺

## Credits and Synopsis

### Camera Operators

Mark Sloper  
Liam Ayres  
Jamie Tongue  
Film Editor  
David Hughes  
Art Director  
David Palsner  
Sound Recordist  
Paul Kerr

### Production Companies

©A2B Media Ltd  
An A2B Media  
production in  
association with  
The 400 Company  
Executive  
Producers  
Alan Byron

Mark Sloper

In Colour  
[2.35:1]


Distributor  
MusicFilmNetwork

A documentary about the singer Billy Fury, who was born Ronald Wycherley in Liverpool in 1940. The film tracks his rise from humble origins to nationwide celebrity in the 1950s and 1960s and his early death, aged 42, in 1983. The film also charts the birth of rock 'n' roll in the US and the UK's early attempts to produce native rock talent, encouraged by Larry Parnes, the impresario responsible for changing the teenage Ronald's name to Billy Fury. Fellow Parnes protégés, including Vince Eager, recount the merciless touring schedule and hedonism of those days, while family members and former girlfriends discuss Billy's private life, including his fondness for animals, his shyness, his dependency on marijuana and the heart condition that ultimately took his life.






Fighting back: Carey Mulligan, Ben Whishaw

 **Woman** (2013). Most short-changed is real-life suffragette Emily Davison, whose verve and recklessness are barely touched on. Played with quiet determination by Natalie Press, she's a saintly subsidiary presence until she's trampled into martyrdom on the Derby track. Gavron gets a skittering handheld camera deftly into the thick of this action, as she does for the film's shoving demonstrations and fear-drenched prison force-feedings. She and DP Eduard Grau give these scenes a sharp, jostling immediacy. The roving POV is heightened by the film's eagle-eyed take on the new role of cameras, both in the Gleeson character's new-fangled surveillance of the suffragettes and in the women's darting preoccupation with the newsreel lenses that will record their Derby Day quest.

Gifted with an extraordinary performance from Carey Mulligan, the film is kept aloft by her delicate, stripped-down playing of Maud's

journey from hesitant sympathiser to blazingly angry outlaw. Her dazed, crumpled mien in the aftermath of Davison's death wrenchingly questions every decision Maud has made along the way. In a story about collective action, Mulligan keeps her hard-fighting heroine individual, true to her own conscience.

In this, *Suffragette* is the female suffrage struggle reimagined for a time when traditional political loyalties are crumbling. Where TV's *Shoulder to Shoulder* (1974) reflected the 70s preoccupation with socialist idealism and 'women's lib', this latest take on women's history chimes with Occupy-style direct activism and the new global movements for female equality. But most of all it foregrounds self-actualisation, making Maud's journey to find herself as important as her work as a foot soldier in the battle for the vote. Even as women's stories are reclaimed, they're being remade in the image of our own era. 

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Faye Ward  
Alison Owen  
**Written by**  
Abi Morgan  
**Director of Photography**  
Edu Grau  
**Editor**  
Barney Pilling  
**Production Designer**  
Alice Normington  
**Music**  
Alexandre Desplat

**Production Sound Mixer**  
Danny Hambrook  
**Costume Designer**  
Jane Petrie  
  
©Pathé Productions Limited, Channel Four Television Corporation and the British Film Institute  
**Production Companies**  
Pathé, Film4 and BFI present in association

with Ingenious Media with the participation of Canal+ and Ciné+ a Ruby Films production  
Developed by Film4 and Focus Features  
A Ruby Films production for Pathé, Film4, Redgill Productions and BFI  
Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund

**Executive Producers**  
Cameron McCracken  
Tessa Ross  
Rose Garnett  
Nik Bower  
James Schamus  
Teresa Moneo

**Cast**  
**Carey Mulligan**  
Maud Watts  
**Helena Bonham Carter**  
Edith Ellyn

**Brendan Gleeson**  
Inspector Arthur Steed  
**Anne-Marie Duff**  
Violet Miller  
**Ben Whishaw**  
Sonny Watts  
**Romola Garai**  
Alice Haughton  
**Meryl Streep**  
Emmeline Pankhurst  
**Finbar Lynch**  
Hugh Ellyn  
**Natalie Press**  
Emily Wilding Davison

**Samuel West**  
Benedict Haughton  
**Geoff Bell**  
Norman Taylor

**Dolby Digital In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Pathé Productions Ltd

London, 1912. Laundry worker Maud Watts finds herself caught up in the action when a group of suffragettes smash shop windows in Oxford Street. She attends a radical East End suffragette group with friend Violet. Maud testifies about women's working conditions at a parliamentary hearing when Violet is too beaten by her husband to appear. Laundry owner Norman Taylor is sexually assaulting Violet's teenage daughter Maggie, as he did Maud. Imprisoned after a WSPU demo, Maud is warned off activism by Inspector Steed. After attending a speech by Emmeline Pankhurst, she is thrown out by her husband Sonny, and is pictured in the newspapers as a suffragette radical. Fired by Taylor for activism, she burns his hand with a flat iron. Steed, who is tracking the suffragettes, offers her a deal as an informer. Her

group bombs postboxes, and she refuses Steed's offer. The group also bombs Lloyd George's empty second home, though a disquieted Violet has quit. Sonny has their son George adopted, despite Maud's protests. Maud and her group are imprisoned and force-fed while on hunger strike, to Steed's horror. When released, they plan a demonstration at the Epsom Derby. Steed tracks them to the racecourse. Maud and Emily Davison fail to get entry to the paddock. Suddenly, Davison steps in front of the king's horse during the race and is killed. Steed lets a dazed Maud go free. Maud pulls Maggie out of the laundry and persuades the local MP's sympathetic wife to employ her. Along with thousands of other mourners, she attends Davison's funeral, which draws much press coverage.

## SuperBob

United Kingdom 2014  
Director: Jon Drever  
Certificate 15 82m 20s

### Reviewed by Katy McGahan

Gotham has Batman, Metropolis Superman and New York City Spiderman – and now Peckham, South London, spawns its very own superhero, SuperBob. When unassuming postman Bob Kenner is struck by a meteorite, he is endowed with extraordinary powers; recruited by the Ministry of Defence, he is sent on life-saving missions all over the world. Seven years on, a documentary crew is following him around, capturing the superhero on his day off. What the film crew finds is a regular South London guy who squabbles with his cleaner and bemoans the endless form-filling associated with his role as a 'civil servant'. Where SuperBob's predecessors fought the likes of megalomaniacal Lex Luthor or the psychopathic Joker against a backdrop of explosions and collapsing skyscrapers, SuperBob is shown shopping in Peckham Market or singing in the local gospel choir.

The faux documentary conceit is a fresh and welcome take on the superhero genre. The prologue, with its far-fetched news reports and amusing vox pops (one witness describes her sighting of the meteorite, announcing that "my dog was very wide-eyed – he only ever gets that look when he sees a bitch across the park"), propels us into a madcap world of superhero pastiche, accentuated by the film's unglamorous setting and unlikely, self-effacing ex-postie hero. Regrettably, the tempo stalls when we meet SuperBob at home and the film settles into cosier romcom-veering-into-sitcom territory, albeit with an MoD subplot involving Bob's boss trying to contract him out to the US military.

*SuperBob* is Jon Drever's feature debut. As with his 2009 short of the same title, he collaborates here with actor/writer/stand-up Brett Goldstein, who plays Bob in both films and had script input. They have some serious talent on board in the shape of Catherine Tate, whose unflinchingly taut comic timing is put to excellent use in the



Is it a nerd? Brett Goldstein

## They Will Have to Kill Us First

United Kingdom/USA 2015  
Director: Johanna Schwartz

role of Bob's MoD boss, and Ruth Sheen (who has graced six Mike Leigh films) as SuperBob's mother. The love story between Bob and his fiery cleaner Dorris (played by Natalia Tena – Nymphadora Tonks in the *Harry Potter* series), whose *His Girl Friday*-style quickfire backchat keeps her dull-witted employer firmly on his toes, is the lifeblood of the film, but unfortunately the characters and subplots that satellite around it are left to peter out.

The tone is also problematic, in that it ricochets between romcom sweetness and superhero action scenes. (There is a jarring moment when a woman suffering severe injuries after a car crash dies in SuperBob's arms.) Occasionally, SuperBob's security man Barry, who lives in a shed in the garden, emerges to ask Bob to unscrew a jar of honey or open a bag of crisps. More scenes like these would have helped sustain the promising madcap tone of the opening sequences. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Jon Drever Wayne Marc Godfrey Robert Jones	Jones Company Productions, The Fyzz Facility present a Fyzz Facility Film	<b>Catherine Tate</b> Theresa
<b>Written by</b> Brett Goldstein Will Bridges	Five production in association with Dragon Root Securities, Meridius Global Investments, Goldcrest Films International	<b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1]
<b>Story</b> Will Bridges Jon Drever Brett Goldstein Based on the short film written by Jon Drever	<b>Executive Producers</b> Orlando Von Einsiedel David Gilbery Ben Kaye Nick Quested Arnaud Lannic Christophe Lannic	<b>Distributor</b> Signature Entertainment
<b>Director of Photography</b> Mattias Nyberg	<b>Cast</b> Brett Goldstein Robert Kenner, 'SuperBob' Natalia Tena Dorris	
<b>Editor</b> Katie Bryer	<b>Laura Haddock</b> June	
<b>Production Designer</b> Janice Flint	<b>Ruth Sheen</b> Pat	
<b>Music Composer</b> Rupert Christie	<b>David Harewood</b> Simon	
<b>Sound Recordist</b> Ludovic Lasserre		
<b>Costume Designer</b> Lindsay Pugh		
©The Fyzz Facility Film Five Limited <b>Production Companies</b> Grain Media,		

Peckham, South London, seven years ago. Struck by a meteorite, postman Bob Kenner is miraculously endowed with superpowers. He is recruited by the Ministry of Defence and sent on life-saving missions around the world.

Present day. Bob is the subject of a documentary and has a film crew following him around on his day off. He has become bored with the red tape associated with being a 'civil servant' and decides he wants excitement of a different kind in his life. He is attracted to June, an American woman who works in his local library, and they arrange to have dinner. In the meantime, a relationship begins to blossom between Bob and his cleaner Dorris, who also works at his elderly mother's care home. During the date with June, Bob realises that he is in love with Dorris.

A US senator, intent on contracting Bob for American military missions, approaches Bob's boss Theresa. Under pressure – and to Bob's dismay – Theresa commits him to various international public-relations events. Eventually, the mild-mannered Bob becomes more assertive. He gives up his job and moves to Colombia with Dorris, who fulfils her dream of running a children's nursery.

### Reviewed by Frances Morgan

Any film about Mali released this year risks being overshadowed by *Timbuktu*, Abderrahmane Sissako's recent fictional portrayal of life under Islamist occupation in the northern Malian city. Johanna Schwartz's documentary about the music ban imposed in northern Mali during the occupation is a useful companion piece to that film, in which forbidden music plays a small but devastating role, but lacks its poetry and sense of deep connection to the country. This is forgivable, but less so is the absence of reflexivity around the US-born, UK-based filmmaker's presence in the narrative. Indeed, the formal confidence and undoubted visual flair with which Schwartz presents the stories of musicians such as veteran singer Khaira Arby and newcomers Songhoy Blues encourages the viewer to forget that the director is there at all. The result is a highly watchable and accessible film but one that elides awkward questions about how African musical traditions are interpreted by and for the west.

Musicians' voices are not the only ones to have been silenced in Mali, but they provide an ideal conduit through which to convey the horror of such silencing. Additionally, Mali's diverse music is one of its foremost cultural exports, with artists releasing records on European labels and touring widely on the 'world music' circuit. Arby's already ambassadorial status as a musician allows her to take an active part in raising awareness of the conflict.

Schwartz turns an intimate, sympathetic lens on this public figure, who is frequently seen on the move and in seemingly temporary accommodation, always beautifully dressed and composed. Relocated to Malian capital Bamako, where the ban is not enforced, Arby writes songs in response to events, including one welcoming the French military sent to conduct air strikes against the Islamist militants in 2013. Fadimata 'Disco' Walet Oumar, the singer in Tuareg rock band Tartit, is another formidable female presence. The wife of MNLA leader Hassan Ag Mehdi (nicknamed 'Jimmy'), whose movement for the independence of northern Mali created the conditions for the Islamist takeover, she adapts to life in exile by translating at a women's refugee camp; she talks candidly about politics and marriage, and the strain that one has put on the other. In contrast, Jimmy's nephew Moussa, a guitarist whose wife has survived imprisonment and rape, seems truly lost; he reiterates the oxygen-like importance of music, as does every participant, but also its limitations.



Protest song: Khaira Arby

It is Arby and Disco who organise the small but significant concert in Timbuktu in 2014 that closes Schwartz's documentary. This is one of her film's more positive story arcs; the other is the rise of Songhoy Blues, a band formed by refugees from the north living in Bamako. A scene showing the young men jamming a new song as the sun sets, then packing up because they don't feel safe after dark, illustrates the ordinary and extraordinary nature of their situation. The group take part in Africa Express, an initiative fostering collaborations with western musicians; they thrive in this setting and record an album with American guitarist Nick Zinner, who also provides original music for the film. A trip to London sees them signing a record deal and playing at the Royal Albert Hall with Africa Express founder Damon Albarn. These scenes of overseas success are countered by the reminder that Songhoy Blues are still effectively exiled, and that when they go home, they will find, as Arby does in Timbuktu's devastated radio station, that "everything had changed".

Although the ban has been lifted, there is still unrest in Timbuktu; the women's outdoor concert isn't announced until just a few hours before it begins. But our experience of that concert is marred by a surge of soundtrack music drowning Disco's performance – a decision that not only seems culturally arrogant but counteracts the film's espousal of Malian music as a healing force. We hear Arby briefly, however, and her electrified voice spirals up into the evening along with an unearthly whoop from the audience. It is a transcendent moment that needs no translation or emotional framing. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Johanna Schwartz Sarah Mosses John Schwartz Kat Amara Korba	<b>Performed by</b> Nick Zinner <b>Re-recording Mixer</b> Phitz Hearne	Knitting Factory Entertainment <b>Executive Producers</b> André Singer Stephen Hendel Victoria Steventon
<b>Written by</b> Johanna Schwartz Andy Morgan <b>Cinematographer</b> Karelle Walker	©Mojo Musique Limited <b>Production Companies</b> Mojo Musique in association with Together Films and Spring Films	<b>In Colour</b> [1.85:1]
<b>Editors</b> Guy Creasey Andrea Carnevali <b>Original Score Composed and</b>	<b>Distributor</b> Together Films	

A documentary about the experiences of Malian musicians following the civil war of 2012, during which the playing of music was banned by Islamist extremists occupying the northern cities of Gao and Timbuktu. Exiled in the capital Bamako or in Burkina Faso, singers Khaira Arby and Fadimata 'Disco' Walet Oumar, whose husband is a prominent member of the Tuareg liberation movement MNLA, see fighting escalate during 2012 and 2013. Meanwhile Songhoy Blues, a band formed by young refugees from the north, take part in Damon Albarn's Africa Express project and tour the UK. In 2014, Arby and Disco return to Timbuktu for a successful concert.



## The Transporter Refuelled

France/China/Belgium 2015  
Director: Camille Delamarre  
Certificate 15 96m 7s

### Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

Watching big-budget studio films can be like reading the contracts that directed their production. Parsing the tax-incentivised locations, conspicuous product placement and geographic spread of production companies involved can sometimes prove more interesting and enlightening than the film itself. That's true of *The Transporter Refuelled*, a wan relaunch of the Jason Statham franchise which marks the first of a planned three sequels to be co-financed by Luc Besson's EuropaCorp production company/distributor and China's Fundamental Films. This is the logical capper for an end-of-summer release after a season that saw Alibaba investing in *Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation* and the first American film financed solely by Chinese money in *Southpaw*, bankrolled by conglomerate Dalian Wanda. This production/distribution deal confirms EuropaCorp's ongoing ascent as a reliably profitable purveyor of (mostly) action films that perform well around the world, including in the often-resistant-to-the-foreign American market; in a saturation sense, the collective output supervised by Besson represents French film culture's most meaningful footprint on English-speaking audiences.

EuropaCorp's diverse output includes a wide spread of work, including some credible prestige products (most recently, Bertrand Bonello's *Saint Laurent*). Continuing the traditions of its similarly minded predecessor Cannon Films, the mid-budgeted movies EuropaCorp is most associated with behave as if the CGI revolution never came, instead cosmetically updating basic 80s action tropes with more colour correction and shaky-cam. *The Transporter* franchise's most reliable asset came from Statham's laconic hard-man charisma as the titular getaway driver for hire. Only the second film, with its blithely against-the-laws-of-physics set pieces, provided a true rush; the first was too self-serious and the third mostly grating. As Statham has candidly said, he wasn't offered enough money to return for a fourth instalment, so his place has been taken by the far less imposing Ed Skrein. Though appealing in his own right, Skrein lacks Statham's credibly invincible aura, projecting a mildly

likeable scrappiness rather than indomitability beneath the usual neatly tailored suits.

He can, at least, fight, as established in the *Transporter*-vs-parking-garage-punks opener that once again reverentially circles the latest Audi on display. The regrettably few martial-arts showpieces are shot well enough to do justice to some occasionally inventive choreography, notably one scene involving the improvised use of filing cabinets as obstacles and weapons. The plentiful car chases are less exciting, pausing to revel in demolition-derby moments when automobiles collide with each other and fall end over end but making a dull hash of the action unfolding alongside the destruction. There's an emphasis on character development and emotional involvement (counterproductive to the *Transporter*'s stoic appeal), with a subplot about the driver's close/fraught emotional relationship with his father (Ray Stevenson) and a love interest in enslaved sex worker Anna (Loan Chabanol). Like *Taken* minus the xenophobia, *The Transporter Refuelled* ostensibly decries the horrors of sex slavery – although, given the film's repeated emphasis on ass close-ups, it's hard to take that plot emphasis seriously.

The film is at least noticeably non-American in some of its tangential dialogue. Frenchness emerges in repeated quotations from *The Three Musketeers*, and a general EU sense of crisis is acknowledged via the *Transporter*'s father grumbling about his small pension and declaring that "the system's broken". The lush Riviera scenery is showcased in regular helicopter shots, which help to break up the monotony.

Despite his many clunkers, at his best Besson has demonstrated a technical aptitude for gunplay bordering on the genuinely innovative, but EuropaCorp's house stable of directors is considerably less talented. Here, director Camille Delamarre (*Brick Mansions*) proves only slightly more adept than fellow EuropaCorp house hack Olivier Megaton (*Transporter 3*, *Taken 2*). And a basic error will leave viewers puzzled: after a 1995 prologue, a title card announces "15 years later". If this film really is meant to be set in 2010 (which would make no sense), how do characters have the iPhone 6? **S**

## The Visit

USA/Japan 2015  
Director: M. Night Shyamalan  
Certificate 15 93m 58s

### Reviewed by Adam Nayman

After a period of moving ever further afield from his native Pennsylvania – deep space in *The Last Airbender* (2010) and the distant future in *After Earth* (2013), and into the Hollywood wilderness in both cases – M. Night Shyamalan sets his latest film on home turf. And, for a while at least, he moves over these stomping grounds with a nimble tread. (It helps that he isn't weighed down by the blockbuster budgets he commanded not so long ago.)

Invited to spend a midwinter week with their estranged grandparents, teenage siblings Rebecca (Olivia DeJonge) and Tyler (Ed Oxenbould) decide to record the experience – a plan that's partially tied to film student Rebecca's wannabe auteurism but also a way to provide their mom (Kathryn Hahn) with a record of the family's healing process. After a while, their cameras start catching weird things going on with Nana (Deanna Dunagan) and Pop Pop (Peter McRobbie), who seem to be suffering from mental ailments that tweak their behaviour in sinister ways – though they maintain that everything is fine.

Shyamalan previously integrated some found-footage scenes into *The Happening* (2008) – you'll doubtless recall the bit where a camera phone catches one unfortunate soul's mauling by zoo lions – but he goes all out here and, with the help of cinematographer Maryse Alberti, manages a synthesis that few other directors have with the format. The frames are not only spatially coherent but packed with narrative and even thematic information, and while the characters' decisions to keep shooting in the midst of accelerating craziness still smack of contrivance – a common problem with the genre – the dichotomy between the story's fairytale underpinnings and its hyperreal DV textures is compelling and clever.

There's another crucial tension here, between Shyamalan's meticulousness as a storyteller – his need to plant and cultivate the seeds of his plot twists – and his basic hopelessness as a dramatist, which has plagued his work since the very beginning. In a way, *The Visit* is the inverse of *The Village* (2004), a failed thriller that was at least a conceptual coup. Here the scares are fine-tuned, but the inevitable revelations of what's 'actually' happening detract from the film's impact.



Blood relatives: Peter McRobbie

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Mark Gao  
Luc Besson

#### Written by

Adam Cooper  
Bill Collage  
Luc Besson

Based on characters created by Luc Besson, Robert Mark Kamen

#### Director of

Photography  
Cristophe Collette

#### Editor

Julien Rey

#### Production Designer

Hugues Tissandier

#### Original Score

Alexandre Azaria

#### Sound Mixer

Thomas Lascar

#### Costume Designer

Claire Lacaze

#### Car Stunt

Co-ordinator

Michel Julienne

#### Fight Choreographer

Alain Figlarz

©EuropaCorp, TF1

Films Production

#### Production

Companies

EuropaCorp presents

A EuropaCorp, TF1

Films Production

and Fundamental

Films co-production

With the participation

of Canal+, OCS,

TF1 and TMC

#### Cast

Ed Skrein

Frank Martin

Ray Stevenson

Frank Martin Sr

Loan Chabanol

Anna

Gabriella Wright

Gina

Tatiana Pajkovic

Maria

Wenxia Yu

Qiao

Rasha Bukvic

Arkady Karasov

Lenn Kudrjawizki

Leo Imasova

Anatole Taubman

Stanislas Turgin

Noémie Lenoir

Maissa

Yuri Kolokolnikov

Yuri

Samir Guesmi

Inspector Bectoui

Robbie Nock

co-pilot Air Yuri

#### Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

Icon Film Distribution

French theatrical title

Le Transporteur

Héritage

The French Riviera, 1995. Russian criminal Arkady Karasov violently establishes himself as a prostitution kingpin.

Fifteen years later, sex worker Anna and three of her colleagues decide to break away from Karasov. In order to rob two of his former partners, they enlist the help of the *Transporter*, a mercenary getaway driver, by

kidnapping and threatening to kill his father. With the *Transporter*'s help, Anna and her friends successfully frame Karasov for their crimes and steal \$320m. The *Transporter* kills Karasov in a fight and separates from Anna, for whom he has developed feelings.

One month later, Anna is seen transferring large amounts of the money into strangers' accounts.

## We Are Your Friends

France/United Kingdom/USA/Luxembourg 2015

Director: Max Joseph

Certificate 15 95m 53s

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Known mainly for its porn industry, the San Fernando Valley lies close enough to Los Angeles for the city's bright lights to beckon, yet far enough away for the promises they hold to seem tantalisingly out of reach. That sense of place – and the notion of ordinary working-class youths trying to get ahead in the social context it provides – lends *We Are Your Friends* a solid grounding. Ultimately, however, Max Joseph's patchy drama avoids gritty insight and decides on the easier option of feelgood superficiality.

For Zac Efron's ambitious protagonist Cole, DJ-ing presents a route to the rewards he sees Wes Bentley's established recording artist James enjoying, since these days DJs don't just spin discs but build their own dance tracks on their laptops. Indeed, some of the strongest scenes show Cole and James at work in the studio, as the latter provides mentoring advice on the effective layering of rhythm tracks. We learn about dance music's relationship to the human heartbeat, and later see Cole achieve a creative breakthrough by putting his own stamp on his music via field recordings made during a morning run. All this builds up an effective complicity between Efron's character and the viewer, since we can see he's gifted enough to deserve a decent break, but the narrative gets into a tangle by combining in Bentley's enviably successful yet self-loathing star DJ both the mentor who can help Cole and the antagonist standing in his way.

In one sense, Bentley's glowering turn makes it implicit that success may not be everything the younger man has imagined, yet after expending much energy on getting Cole and James's girlfriend Sophie (model-turned-actress Emily Ratajkowski) to fall for each other and wind up together in a Las Vegas hotel bed, the script effectively paints itself into a corner. An angry, betrayed James has to cool down enough to offer his errant protégé a coveted music-festival slot where many a



Turning the tables: Zac Efron

newcomer has caught the industry eye. So while the film initially promised to tackle the lot of marginalised outsiders hoping to break into the system, ultimately Cole's opportunity depends on the magnanimity of an industry insider with ample reason to despise him.

It can't help but feel that the film has shied away from tackling the deeper social issues it set up for itself, a suspicion magnified during a final-reel coda that hands out positive resolutions for sundry supporting characters with all the generosity of Santa on Christmas morning. True, we can't begrudge the likeable if somewhat limited Cole (emotional range may not be Efron's forte) his step up the ladder, but comparisons with, say, the downbeat pragmatism of John Badham's *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) – an essentially similar tale of no-hopers in search of the big time – leave this slickly put-together contemporary confection looking very much the lesser movie. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Jason Blum Marc Bienstock M. Night Shyamalan	Universal Pictures presents a Blinding Edge Pictures/ Blumhouse production	<b>Deanna Dunagan</b> Nana
<b>Written by</b> M. Night Shyamalan	An M. Night Shyamalan film	<b>Peter McRobbie</b> Pop Pop
<b>Director of Photography</b> Maryse Alberti	Presented in association with Dentsu Inc./ Fuji Television Network, Inc.	<b>Kathryn Hahn</b> Mom
<b>Edited by</b> Luke Ciarrocchi	<b>Executive Producers</b> Steven Schneider Ashwin Rajan	<b>Celia Keenan- Bolger</b> Stacey
<b>Production Designer</b> Naaman Marshall	<b>Cast</b> <b>Olivia DeJonge</b> Becca	<b>Dolby Digital In Colour</b>
<b>Supervising Sound Editor</b> Skip Lievsay	<b>Ed Oxenbould</b> Tyler	<b>Distributor</b> Universal Pictures International UK & Eire
<b>Costume Designer</b> Amy Westcott		
©Universal Studios <b>Production Companies</b>		

Pennsylvania, the present. Fifteen-year-old Rebecca and her younger brother Tyler are going to the countryside to visit their grandparents for the first time. Rebecca plans to make a documentary about their visit and hopes her film will help her mother Paula come to terms with the family's estrangement. Nana and Pop Pop meet Rebecca and Tyler at the train station and bring them to their farmhouse, far from town. The siblings are informed that they should not go into the basement – due to mould – and that they should stay in their beds after 9.30pm.

During the first two days of their visit, Rebecca and Tyler discover that Nana and Pop Pop have some very odd habits, and that Nana suffers from 'sundowning' – a form of dementia that affects her at night. Unnerved but determined to finish the visit – and her film – Rebecca ignores Tyler's complaints that something is seriously wrong. However, after they leave the camera out one night and record footage of Nana walking around the house with a knife, they decide to contact Paula and leave. When they finally connect with Paula on Skype and show her images of Nana and Pop Pop, she's horrified to see that they are not her parents: it's revealed that they are escaped asylum patients who have killed Paula's parents and assumed their identities. The couple try to murder the children, but Rebecca and Tyler fight back and kill them before the police arrive. Rebecca finishes her film.

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Tim Bevan Eric Fellner Liza Chasin	Studiocanal and Warner Bros. Pictures present in association with Anton Capital Entertainment, S.C.A. a Working Title production	<b>Wiley Pickett</b> Carl
<b>Screenplay</b> Max Joseph Meaghan Oppenheimer	<b>Executive Producers</b> Richard Silverman Olivier Courson Ron Halpern Nathan Kelly	<b>Jon Abrahams</b> Nicky
<b>Story</b> Richard Silverman		<b>Dolby Digital In Colour [1.85:1]</b>
<b>Director of Photography</b> Brett Pawlak		<b>Distributor</b> Studiocanal Limited
<b>Editors</b> Terel Gibson David Diliberto	<b>Cast</b> <b>Zac Efron</b> Cole	
<b>Production Designer</b> Maya Sigel	<b>Emily Ratajkowski</b> Sophie	
<b>Original Score</b> Segal	<b>Shiloh Fernandez</b> Ollie	
<b>Cole's Music</b> Pyramid	<b>Alex Shaffer</b> Squirrel	
<b>Re-recording Mixers</b> Skip Lievsay Aaron Glascock	<b>Jonny Weston</b> Mason	
<b>Costume Designer</b> Christie Wittenborn	<b>Wes Bentley</b> James	
	<b>Jon Bernthal</b> Paige	
	<b>Alicia Coppola</b> Mrs Romero	
©StudioCanal S.A. <b>Production Companies</b>		

San Fernando Valley, California, present day. Aspiring DJ Cole and his friends Mason, Ollie and Squirrel struggle to make much money from the local weekly club night they promote. Cole is convinced he has the talent to go further, and when he's befriended by older, internationally successful DJ James, he is determined to seize his opportunity and demonstrate his mixing skills at an upscale house party. Cole and friends reluctantly take day jobs working for property agent Paige, but Cole's major focus is on making new tracks with James in the latter's hi-tech studio.

Cole falls for James's assistant/girlfriend Sophie, and notices that James's drinking is putting a strain on their relationship. Cole and Sophie sleep together after a Las Vegas gig, prompting a violent response from James and seemingly threatening Cole's career hopes. Meanwhile, Mason has rented the boys a new apartment with a pool; they throw a big party, during which Squirrel dies from a drugs overdose. Recriminations over the death put a strain on the group's friendship.

Although Sophie has now left him, James remains committed to offering Cole an opening slot at LA's prestigious Summerfest. Cole puts together a distinctive new track, mixing in field recordings from his phone, and wows the massive crowd. Success beckons, and he gets together again with Sophie.



# Home cinema



Law and order: Henry Fonda (left) as Wyatt Earp, with Tim Holt, Ward Bond, Victor Mature and Alan Mowbray, in *My Darling Clementine*

## HOW THE MYTH WAS MADE

When John Ford and Henry Fonda put the Wyatt Earp story on screen, they created the heroic legend that lives on indestructibly today

### MY DARLING CLEMENTINE

John Ford; USA 1946; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 97 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: pre-release version of film, Allan Dwan's 'Frontier Marshal' (1938), commentary, documentaries, 'Movie Masterclass' with Lindsay Anderson, featurette, two radio plays, stills gallery, trailers, booklet

#### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

History, it's often been said, is written by the victors. It's also written by the survivors. Wyatt Earp, gambler, saloon-keeper, brothel-owner, pimp, crooked boxing referee, escaped convict and – briefly – deputy and then assistant city marshal, had the luck or the cunning to live on well into the Hollywood era, dying in 1929 at the age of 80. And, somewhere around the mid-1920s, he met John Ford. According to Ford, Earp told him exactly what happened in the famous shootout at the OK Corral in Tombstone, Arizona Territory, in 1881, and in *My Darling Clementine* Ford "did it just the

way it was". But as Tag Gallagher notes in the essay-featurette 'Lost and Gone Forever' accompanying this release, "Wyatt Earp's stories were blarney, and Ford's story was blarney too."

Despite which, it's thanks largely to Ford's film – only his second sound western, after *Stagecoach* (1939) – that the legend of Wyatt Earp, heroic frontier marshal, righteous upholder of the law, lives indestructibly on. Subsequent cinematic portrayals, of which there's been no shortage, have done little to dent the image. John Sturges's *Gunfight at the OK Corral* (1957) offered a grimmer, granitic Earp in Burt Lancaster, but broadly followed the Ford template. Ten years later and in a more cynical decade, Sturges directed a sequel, *Hour of the Gun* (1967), with James Garner's Earp a more ambiguous but ultimately justified figure hunting down the remnants of the Clanton gang.

That hint of ambiguity has lived on in most of the subsequent Earp movies, most notably in Frank Perry's *Doc* (1971), with Stacy Keach's Doc Holliday taking top billing over Harris Yulin's Earp. Perry's film offered perhaps the most sceptical view of the Earp legend to date; slightly less debunking were George P. Cosmatos's ponderous *Tombstone* (1993), with Kurt Russell as Earp, and Lawrence Kasdan's three-hours-plus

*Wyatt Earp* (1994) with Kevin Costner in the title role. More recently, we've had Michael Feifer's straight-to-video *Wyatt Earp's Revenge* (2012), with Val Kilmer (Doc Holliday in *Tombstone*) as an ageing Wyatt recalling the events of his youth. An even older Earp featured in *Sunset* (1988), again played by James Garner, teaming up with film star Tom Mix (Bruce Willis) to solve a murder mystery in 1929 Hollywood. Ford himself tossed in an ill-judged spoof of Earp (James Stewart) and Holliday (Arthur Kennedy) as a would-be comic interlude in his final western, *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964). And, of course, Earp has shown up countless times on TV, including – as Kim Newman reminds us in the booklet essay accompanying this set – in an episode of *Doctor Who*.

Nor was Ford's the first movie to put Wyatt Earp on screen, even if not always under that name. In Edward L. Cahn's *Law and Order* (1932), Walter Huston was 'Frame Johnson', setting

*Ford imbues his story with grandeur, dignity and an instinctive visual poetry that few other westerns can match*

out to clean up Tombstone (script by Walter's son John), while Lewis Seiler's *Frontier Marshal* (1934) had George O'Brien performing similar duties as 'Michael Wyatt'. As late as 1939 Errol Flynn was 'Wade Hatton' in Michael Curtiz's *Dodge City*. That same year, though, Earp finally appeared on screen under his own name in another film entitled *Frontier Marshal*, this time directed by the versatile veteran Allan Dwan – and it's this film that is presented complete as a key extra in Arrow's generously packaged set.

Those familiar with *My Darling Clementine* but less so with Dwan's film – which is probably most of us – may be surprised how much Ford and his screenwriter Winston Miller lifted from the earlier movie. Several incidents are repeated almost frame for frame: Earp, newly arrived in town, knocking cold a drunken gun-toting Mexican on the rampage (played in both films by the same actor, Charles Stevens); Earp waking the mayor in the middle of the night to accept the marshal's job that he previously turned down; Earp dunking the bad girl (Binnie Barnes/Linda Darnell) in a horse trough for helping poker players to cheat. In both films, an effete stage performer from the east comes to put on a show in the saloon, is hijacked by the villains and has to be rescued by Earp and Doc Holliday; in Dwan's film it's the real-life comedian Eddie Foy (played on screen by his son), in Ford's a grandiloquent (and fictitious) Shakespearean actor called Granville Thorndyke (Alan Mowbray). There are several other points of resemblance between the two films, almost enough for *Clementine* to qualify as a remake. But in a long interview reprinted in the booklet, Miller insists that neither he nor Ford ever saw Dwan's film, even though its screenwriter (Sam Hellman) receives a story credit for *Clementine*.

Dwan's *Frontier Marshal* is a well-made, pacy movie, more rough-edged than Ford's, with a typically rugged performance from Randolph Scott as Earp and an affectingly febrile Cesar Romero as Halliday [sic]. In the intro to his book-length interview with Dwan, Peter Bogdanovich observes: "If Ford's [film] is poetry, Dwan's is good prose." In the same book, Dwan – far less blarney-prone than Ford – admits his film had few pretensions to historical accuracy. "We never meant it to be Wyatt Earp. We were just making *Frontier Marshal* and that could be any frontier marshal."

But as Scott Eyman, Ford's biographer, points out in his voiceover commentary, if *My Darling Clementine* plays fast and loose with history it hardly matters – any more than do the borrowings from Dwan's version. What counts is that Ford imbues his story with grandeur, dignity and a seemingly instinctive visual poetry that few other westerns can match. Despite the title, the movie is less about Wyatt Earp's shy romance with Bostonian nurse Clementine (the rather pallid Cathy Downs), or his uneasy relationship with the drunken, consumptive Doc Holliday (a surprisingly effective Victor Mature) – or even the final showdown with the villainous Clantons. Like so many of Ford's westerns, it's about the coming of civilisation to the frontier,

most perfectly captured in the sequence of the dance in the unfinished church where Earp diffidently partners Clementine. (Ford, according to Miller, "loved Fonda's hippety-hop dance", already displayed in *Young Mr Lincoln*, 1939.)

The film is also, again like much of Ford's work, about family. In *Frontier Marshal*, Earp is brotherless and the Clantons don't even figure. But in *Clementine*, the clash is between the good family and the bad family, and Earp's primary motivation for staying in Tombstone and taking on the post of marshal is the killing by the Clantons of his youngest brother, the 18-year-old James. (In reality, James Earp lived on until 1926.)



Fonda with Cathy Downs as Clementine

Fox's 4K Blu-ray digital transfer looks nothing less than superb, an ideal showcase for Ford's majestic black-and-white compositions and lyrical cloudscapes. Eyman's expert commentary, with occasional interpolations from a latter-day member of the Earp clan, fills in the historical production background for us. But perhaps the most fascinating of the extras is the 'pre-release' version of the movie, incorporating some six minutes of extra footage and other revealing differences. As Robert Gitt of the UCLA Film & Television Archive explains in the accompanying featurette, this dates from some way through producer Darryl F. Zanuck's radical re-editing of Ford's initial version. Not entirely with Ford's approval, Zanuck chopped some 30 minutes out of the initial cut, called in studio workhorse Lloyd Bacon to reshoot some scenes and added a good deal of extra music on the soundtrack. This 'pre-release' version lets us see at least some fragments of what Ford originally intended.

We also get a somewhat over-reverential documentary, *John Ford and Monument Valley*, featuring interviews with Ford, Fonda, John Wayne, James Stewart, Martin Scorsese and Peter Cowie; a 1988 Channel 4 'Movie Masterclass' with Lindsay Anderson at his most magisterial, addressing a dozen or so overwrought students; and a couple of radio adaptations, one with Fonda reprising his lead role and one with Richard Conte. Altogether a suitably impressive package, doing justice to a classic. 📺

## New releases

### ANGST

Gerald Kargl; Austria 1983; Cult Epics/  
Region B Blu-ray; 83 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: new interviews, introduction by Gaspar Noé, booklet

**Reviewed by Michael Atkinson**

Famous, or infamous, as an influence on Gaspar Noé (who has quite acutely characterised it as 'baroque'), this long-neglected and ill-distributed Austrian film has acquired an army of cultists it doesn't really require. It's a methodical psychopath story, but however lauded by the psychotronic fanboys as representing some kind of extreme 'nasty' film-watching experience, Gerald Kargl's picture pushes no limit for graphic gore; rather, it is a trippy, vertiginous portrait of senseless violence that manages to be more upsetting in its camerawork than in its action.

The simple first-person narrative adapts the real crimes of impulsive Austrian serial killer Werner Kniesek, closely following a nameless maniac (a vein-popping Erwin Leder) as he gets paroled out of prison for previous murders and instantly begins searching for a new set of victims, as if satisfying a sexual need. Soon, he finds the right house, inhabited by an ageing matriarch, a young-adult daughter, a wheelchair-bound son and a very friendly dachshund. The rest of the film is the killer's compulsive, sloppy, hapless project of murdering the family, performed in fits and starts and with an array of stratagems.

It can be gruelling, but the achievement is strictly visual – Kargl's film doesn't look quite like any other. The style agenda (crafted by DP Zbigniew Rybczynski) is dominated by two moves: swivelling, analytical ceiling-views of the agonising action, and chest-strapped close-ups that pulse with the killer's sweaty urges and move on an arc around him, isolating him in his own sphere. Everywhere we look, our perspective is uneasily unpredictable. Often the camera, on its various improvised rigs, shakes and shudders as it rockets around after the protagonist, and the aggregate effect is of a subjectivised world gone absolutely haywire.

If only we had a good idea why. Kargl is striving for intimacy, and the



Driven to murder: *Angst*



# New releases

mundane blandness of the narration (which is most of the soundtrack – the score by Tangerine Dream's Klaus Schulze is subtle and sparsely used during most of the action) gets us there rather easily. The killer's pathological needs and his helplessness as they take over are crystal clear. But so?

The purpose of *Angst* is elusive. It's not scary or suspenseful in a genre sense, its psychology is deliberately textbook, and its violence, despite a rather pitiful fit of necrophilia, is almost tasteful. Its relentlessly inventive imagery suggests a vision but the takeaway is strangely uninteresting; although the Kniesek killings marked Austrian consciousness, the violence here suggests no larger significance. Do run-of-the-mill psychopaths, being aberrations, actually mean anything? In the end, however much the movie is light years beyond any 'extreme' slasher-fest you can think of, there's little being said.

**Disc:** The Blu-ray, simultaneously released in a French version, restores censored bits and pieces, and cuts a distributor-added prologue (it's here as an option).

## DRAGON'S RETURN

Eduard Grečner; Czechoslovakia 1967; Second Run/Region 2 DVD; 81 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: filmed introduction, booklet

**Reviewed by Virginie Sélavy**

A remarkable example of the stark, sparse monochrome beauty so strikingly mastered by Eastern European filmmakers (from František Vlácil to Béla Tarr), *Dragon's Return* was directed by Eduard Grečner in 1967, just before the Soviet invasion put an end to the formal experimentations that had flourished in his native Czechoslovakia earlier in the decade. Mixing folktale and modernist innovations, it tells a simple story: a potter nicknamed Dragon returns to the village from which he was banished years before. All he seems to want is to be allowed to live in peace in his old house. But the villagers don't trust him, despite his attempts at reconciliation.

In the film's foreboding opening, the camera pans around the bleak mountainous landscape to the sound of an ominous choir. This harsh natural world frames the narrative, which is at once firmly rooted in the reality of the land and permeated with memories and symbolic imagery. The music blends abstract and concrete in the same way, incorporating the bells of starving cows into the eerie choral orchestration, or creating a sense of menace through disembodied whisperings as Dragon enters the deserted village.

The object of the villagers' superstitious fear, Dragon is a formidable presence, seemingly devoid of anger or bitterness, despite the violence and injustice done to him. Throughout the film he simply is, yet his mere existence is perceived as a threat by the community. As his unusual, strangely shaped pottery indicates, his relationship with the villagers is an allegory for the artist's outsider position in society, and for the inevitable solitude of the man of exception.

The story, condensed to its bare essentials, has a potent, primitive resonance born of the rich, poetic intricacies of its visual and sonic design. The unforgettable power of its vision is all there in the quietly devastating ending: a

mute farewell to one's lost love under cover of an embrace with a spouse who was never wanted.

**Disc:** Second Run's restoration does justice to the beauty of the cinematography.

## L'ECLISSE

Michelangelo Antonioni; Italy 1962; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 126 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: biographer interview, trailer

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

If one had to pick a single sequence in an Antonioni film to recommend to newcomers as a one-stop summation of his abiding themes and concerns, it would be hard to beat the opening of *L'eclisse*, with its use of shifting spaces and symbols to depict the irretrievable breakdown of a marriage well before any words are uttered, about five minutes in. And then for an encore there's the equally celebrated closing scenes, favouring natural and man-made landscapes over any human content (the humans in this case having both pointedly failed to turn up for a date). Throughout the film, Monica Vitti and Antonioni's camera (manned here by the great Gianni Di Venanzo) achieve a chemistry that she notably fails to match with her co-stars Alain Delon and Francisco Rabal – it helps that she gets much more screen time here than she did in the film's immediate predecessors *L'avventura* and *La notte*.

*L'eclisse* has worn its half-century well. That's partly because Antonioni's matchless eye for architecture makes its environs seem startlingly modern even today. But it's also because attitudes towards rampant consumer capitalism and tone-deaf insensitivity to the plight of strangers (the dead man in the car) and the lives of other cultures have barely shifted, even if the latter might not be expressed by something as crunchingly unsubtle as a blackface dance (the fault of Vitti's Vittoria rather than Antonioni: the context suggests that he's as appalled by this and the naked racism thereafter as most viewers would be).

Delon's character Piero is cut from the same cloth of unwarranted self-belief as a present-day *Apprentice* contestant, gambling other people's money on the stock market in order to fund his Alfa Romeo habit and judging women by the colour of their hair. On one level, Piero and Vittoria are made for each other, though it's equally clear why their relationship doesn't and



Locomotion capture: *Emperor of the North*

can't last – but nobody ever watched an Antonioni film for a happy ending, and of his great early 60s quartet (including *Red Desert*), *L'eclisse* may just eclipse the others as his masterpiece, or at the very least his most characteristic film.

**Disc:** The high-definition restoration does a bang-up job of capturing Antonioni's abiding fascination with surfaces and textures.

## EMPEROR OF THE NORTH

Robert Aldrich; USA 1973; Twilight Time/Region-free Blu-ray; 120 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: isolated score track, audio commentary with film historian Dana Polan, TV spots, original theatrical trailer

**Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton**

Originally released as *Emperor of the North Pole*, Robert Aldrich's Depression-set paean to the unconquerable hobo spirit is a crash course in the art of 'bo-ing. A tenderfoot would-be tramp, Cigaret (Keith Carradine), tags along with a veteran, 'A-No. 1' (Lee Marvin), and learns the ropes in a trial-by-fire ride, crossing Oregon state to Portland on the No. 19 train, guarded by sadistic conductor Shack (Ernest Borgnine), who is spoken of in hushed whispers around Hooverville campfires. Watch closely and you'll learn the importance of riding downtown, the proper technique for greasing the rails and how to turn a riverside baptism to your advantage or get out of a locked cattle car – even a home remedy for steam burns. (The script, written by one Christopher Knopf and fiddled with by one Sam Peckinpah, cribbs its tricks of the trade from a pair of uncredited memoirs by Jack London.) You can also, watching *Emperor*, learn quite a bit about economical direction and the conveying of character through shrewd action rather than words.

Aldrich worked repeatedly with the same collaborators, and they run a tight ship here: editor Michael Luciano keeps things moving along on schedule, while DP Joseph F. Biroc shifts from a murky brown-grey palette to open-air scenes of considerable natural beauty as the journey progresses. Aldrich made women's pictures as well, but this isn't one of them – the first female appears three-quarters of the way through the movie, shaving her armpits. Instead we get a parade of busted-up grease-smeared mugs, including a briefly glimpsed Sid Haig, and Borgnine, dead game to the end, unforgettably wobbling on two broken knees and cackling with glee as he tries to defend his train beyond all hope or reason, in the most devastating Pyrrhic victory in a filmography that's rife with them – for to be emperor of the North Pole is to reign over nothing at all.

**Disc:** A knockout transfer. Twilight's limited run of 3,000 is sure to go faster than mulligan stew.

## FAT CITY

John Huston; USA 1972; Twilight Time/Region-free Blu-ray; 96 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: isolated score track, audio commentary with film historians Lem Dobbs and Nick Redman, original theatrical trailer

**Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton**

A few scenes come to mind when I think of John Huston's *Fat City*, like the memory of old hurts. The first is the movie's opening: some broken-down dude with mussed,



## AN AMERICAN IN LONDON

Jules Dassin was himself fleeing the anti-communist blacklist when he made this on-the-run movie in a seedy post-war London

### NIGHT AND THE CITY

Jules Dassin; UK 1950; BFI/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 95 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: interview with Jules Dassin, commentaries by Paul Duncan and Adrian Martin, short film comparing US and British versions of the film, booklet with essays by Lee Server and Paul Duncan

#### Reviewed by Kim Newman

Seen from above, London is a grey, damp picture postcard... But after introductory shots and a mock-documentarian waffle of voiceover (by director Jules Dassin himself, in one cut of the film), we touch down near St Paul's and find harsh black-and-white expressionism, with jagged shadows and tilted angles. A flashily dressed man, Harry Fabian (Richard Widmark), is on the run, pursued by a faceless figure.

A threatening ex-partner wants his money back (invested in chemicals for a petrol supplement in the UK version, in a football pool in the US version) and won't be put off any longer by his always hustling, always chattering quarry. As Harry runs across wet cobbles, the flower in his lapel falls off and – though it means losing precious seconds and risking a severe beating – he stops to pick it up and fasten it again.

Before we even know who he is, Dassin and Widmark have shown us what Harry is like. His streak of almost childlike vanity makes an essentially monstrous character human enough for audiences to be invested in his fate, even as his latest get-rich-quick scheme – to stage all-in wrestling matches in defiance of monopolist mobster Kristo (Herbert Lom) – goes wrong far more spectacularly than whatever his last wheeze was. At the end of the film, Harry is on the run through the night again, as “the East End, Soho and the Embankment” are set against him by the price on his head and he hurries towards a shocking dawn rendezvous with ‘The Strangler’ (Mike Mazurki).

Director Dassin was on the run himself, hustling to Europe ahead of the anti-communist blacklist, and told by sympathetic Fox studio head Darryl F. Zanuck to shoot the most expensive scenes first so that the plug couldn't be pulled mid-production. Working from Gerald Kersh's pre-war novel, which Dassin claimed not to have read, various screenwriters (lastly, Jo Eisinger) turned a slice of highly coloured but unsavoury lowlife Soho realism into an archetypal *film noir*.

Harry claims he's been on the run all his life, and we believe it – few films from 1950 are as breathlessly paced as *Night and the City*, and the tightly constructed plot shows how Harry's desperate activities ruin various folks willingly or unwillingly involved with him. All around, people lose their money, their loves, their parents, their business, their ambitions or their lives – as




Flash Harry: Richard Widmark in *Night and the City*

the plates Harry has set spinning fall off their poles while he races on to the next challenge. Give Harry a kinder heart and the US army, and he'd be Phil Silvers's Bilko – but he's also all too likely a showbiz character. A clip-joint tout or a sports promoter rather than in the movie industry, Harry is a shadow of Sammy Glick, the Hollywood huckster of Budd Schulberg's 1941 novel *What Makes Sammy Run*, a property too close to home to get a film adaptation in the era of *noir*.

Dassin always harboured contradictory ambitions – as a melodramatist (*Brute Force*, 1947) and a documentarian (*The Naked City*, 1948). Like Harry, he was an American in London but picked up on the local slang and colour – or was well tutored by British collaborators – and the film stands as a near-definitive entry in the cycle of spiv movies held over from the 1940s (*Noose*, *Waterloo Road*) and a tour of the city's most striking locations (including the rubble-strewn site that would soon become the South Bank). Harry's milieu is mostly the West End

*Decades on, it's hard not to find this world attractive and appealing, even in its blatant cruelties and crookedness*

rather than Soho: well-lit Piccadilly Circus; a ripoff drinking club (the Silver Fox) where the bloated Phil Nossfeross (Francis L. Sullivan) gloats and cackles in his glass office and presses a loathsome kiss on his brittle, treacherous wife Helen (Googie Withers); the gym run by Kristo's wrestling-champion father Gregorius (Stanislaus Zybisko); and the flat of Harry's sometime girlfriend Mary (Gene Tierney), whose purse and drawers he searches through for cash. The film even makes the depths of love – Kristo's for his father, Mary's for Harry, Phil's for Helen, Harry's for a utopian future of success – terrifying and deadly. However, time has changed things – like Kersh, Dassin dwells on seediness (“They're *hand-dipped*, dearie,” Helen snaps about the overpriced chocolates her hostesses are supposed to shove at punters) and makes night-time London a vision of hell. But, decades on, it's hard not to find this world attractive and appealing, even in its blatant cruelties and crookedness. Harry may cheat everyone out of money, but he delivers a priceless show.

The BFI's Blu-ray includes both the US and UK cuts of the film, useful commentary tracks by Adrian Martin and Paul Duncan, interviews with Widmark and Dassin on the stage of the NFT (one of the buildings that rose from the rubble Harry flees across) and an essay booklet. 



# Television

## THE GREEN MAN

Elijah Moshinsky; UK 1990; BBC/Simply Media/  
Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 152 minutes; 1.33:1

**Reviewed by Robert Hanks**

Kingsley Amis's 1969 ghost story is filled with horror, though only a small part of it has supernatural causes: there is the horror of loneliness, of too much drinking, of approaching sexual failure, of death (your parents', your own) and what may come after, and of simply being trapped in yourself... A malevolent 17th-century ghost comes pretty low on the list of terrors.

Albert Finney – looking, deliberately or not, rather like Amis – plays Maurice Allington, proprietor of the Green Man hotel, a devotee of the life of the senses (drink, sex, food, though not so much the food), who starts to see traces of something else: a dead woman, a bizarre fluttering imp that assaults him in his bath, and the shade of Thomas Underhill, a scholar and occultist who is approaching Maurice from beyond the grave, apparently to enlist his help in conducting carnal experiments. At the same time, Maurice is failing to cope with the death of his father and the unhappiness of his children, while struggling hard to persuade his mistress and his wife into a threesome.

Amis himself disliked this BBC adaptation, and it's true that Malcolm Bradbury's script and Elijah Moshinsky's direction catch the horror and strangeness only intermittently. As in most adaptations of Amis, the protagonist's ego and abrasiveness don't translate comfortably from the page. The jokes are often overplayed (viz. Nickolas Grace's trendy vicar), the bawdiness lacks conviction and the special effects are often dreadful, though I did like the bathroom imp. But Michael Culver is an effective quasi-presence as Underhill, there are cameos by Bernard Levin and Clement Freud, and in a key scene Philip Franks is excellent as an unusually unnerving incarnation of God.

**Disc:** Decent transfer from unexceptional source.

## THE KNICK

Steven Soderbergh; USA 2014; Cinemax/Warner/  
Region-free Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 450 minutes; 1.78:1. Features: episode post-ops (cast/crew discussions of plot and historical background)

**Reviewed by Robert Hanks**

Though it's set in the New York of 1900, Steven Soderbergh's medical drama is desperate not to come on as period drama: the credits are in a modernist, sans-serif typeface (for the fetishist: I'm pretty sure it's Helvetica rounded bold) that reeks of 70s science fiction – as do the jumpy, sometimes spaced-out synthesisers of Cliff Martinez's marvellous score. It feels as though you're being nudged into thinking that what you're watching is not the past but a dystopian future. Meanwhile, the shaky camera hides behind beds or peeps in through cracks in doors, observing blood, deformity, the deaths of children, whoring, drug-taking and backstreet quackery that doesn't seem far removed from murder.

All this seems to be deliberate disorientation, a way of persuading the audience that this is not the prelapsarian version of the late-Victorian age – expansive, pacific – that television, especially British television, favours. Inside 'the



**The Knick** Steven Soderbergh's medical drama is desperate not to come on as period drama. Medicine has rarely looked this dangerous on TV.

Knick' (the Knickerbocker Hospital in Harlem), we're in a transitional age, where superstition (leeching and the application of Spanish fly) clings to legitimacy, and progress limps murderously along, sometimes performing miraculous cures, sometimes leaving a trail of dead. Medicine has rarely looked this dangerous on TV; heck, electricity has rarely looked this dangerous. Outside, though it's an ocean away, we're recognisably in the same filthy, post-Darwinian world as *Ripper Street* or *From Hell*.

Clive Owen is Dr Thackery, the Knick's chief surgeon, a brilliant experimentalist, a humane and bold thinker who is also, like chief surgeons from *Holby City* to *Chicago Hope*, arrogant and flawed (his flaws being, entertainingly, cocaine and oriental prostitutes). His main antagonist is Dr Algernon Edwards (André Holland), his deputy and rival, who is also (gasp) black. One of the nice things about the series is that it doesn't try to project modern liberal morals backwards: Thackery is allowed to be both a thoughtful, liberal sex symbol and a thoroughgoing racist.

At times *The Knick* seems too ready to slip into the anti-Victorianism that replaces all virtue with hypocrisy, the questing, scientific spirit with greed and ambition. But it springs constant surprises – plot twists or shifts in tone or gut-wrenching orgies of gore (gorgies?). It is not always convincing but it is nearly always peculiar, and that is not faint praise.

**Disc:** The Blu-ray offers excellent sound

and colour. As special features go, the 'post-ops' feel pretty tokenistic.

## MICROBES AND MEN

UK 1974; BBC/Simply Media/Region 2 DVD;  
Certificate 12; 330 minutes; 1.33:1

**Reviewed by Robert Hanks**

A good companion piece to *The Knick*: a self-consciously sober BBC drama-documentary about the discovery and slow acceptance by medical science of germ theory. The six episodes take the form of biographical dramas about 19th-century men (they're all men) of science – principally Ignaz Semmelweis, Louis Pasteur, Robert Koch and Paul Ehrlich. The shooting is conventional but beautifully done, with what now looks like extraordinarily lavish European location filming. Some of the performances – Robert Lang as the overlooked Semmelweis, Arthur Lowe as an ailing and touchy Pasteur – are superb. At times the science gets chased out by human melodramas – Semmelweis's encroaching madness, Pasteur's rivalry with former disciple Pierre Paul Emile Roux – but a voiceover narrative by the great radio journalist Frank Gillard gives it all a calm coherence. In its solidity and respect for the viewer's intelligence and curiosity, it is the BBC at its Reithian best.

**Disc:** The copy I saw contained one strange, intrusive blip that looked like an artefact of video tape. Otherwise, a clean transfer of a – for the 70s – notably attractive original. ☺

# New releases

thinning hair and holes in his tighty-whities wakes up from a drinking binge and immediately begins rummaging around his room for a cigarette. He can't lay his hands on one so he goes downstairs to look for a fresh pack, but finds some unexpected bounce in his step instead, and decides to get back into training. For Billy Tully (Stacy Keach) is a boxer, or used to be – he hasn't been in the ring in a year and a half.

The second scene I remember is Tully at his local, being picked up by Oma (Susan Tyrrell), a redhead with a taste for cream sherry. "The white race is in its decline. We started downhill in 1492 when Columbus discovered syphilis," she says, "White men are animals." "Oh, c'mon," he says, "we're not so bad." (The dialogue is by Leonard Gardner, closely adapted from his novel of the same name.) When they leave the bar together, Tully discreetly zips up her dress.

The next scene is a private moment: Lucero (former light-heavyweight Sixto Rodriguez), the overworked fighter that Tully is getting ready to face for his comeback, steps off a bus and into his hotel room, where he pisses blood. The fight's over before it even begins; we know that Tully's win is a delusion, a delay of the inevitable.

Finally, there is a scene between Tully and Oma's once-and-future old man, Earl, after things have gone sour and Tully's come to pick up his stuff. Earl is played by Curtis Cokes, a black former world welterweight champ – Huston, himself a former amateur lightweight, filled his movie with fight-game folks. Facing Earl is when Tully knows he's really whipped. Cokes plays the part with a profound, grave dignity, for Earl is perhaps the only character without illusions in this movie full of Eugene O'Neill-esque pipe dreamers. (Aptly, Jeff Bridges, who plays 18-year-old prospect Ernie Munger, would shortly appear in John Frankenheimer's film of *The Iceman Cometh*.)

These are four scenes. Even without rewatching this welcome new Blu-ray, I could have cited about a dozen others just as pungent.

**Disc:** It looks great, by the way. In as much as Stockton, California, has ever looked 'great'.

## THE FRENCH LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN

Karel Reisz; UK 1981; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 123 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: 'The South Bank Show' documentary, interviews with Jeremy Irons, Meryl Streep, editor John Bloom, composer Carl Davis and critic Ian Christie, trailer, printed essay by Lucy Bolton

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

It's strange to recall, in this post-Charlie Kaufman era, just how unusual screenwriter Harold Pinter's meta-cinematic adaptation felt back in 1981. At the time it seemed not just a clever surrogate for source novelist John Fowles's dovetailing of a 19th-century period narrative with very 20th-century critical analysis, but something decidedly innovative in mainstream cinema, even if Pinter's version was necessarily less multifaceted (two-hour film versus 450-page novel).

There were, nevertheless, justified complaints that the (then) present-day story about the lead actors in a film adaptation of the novel pursuing an illicit relationship of their own was less satisfyingly developed than the Victorian equivalent. The passage of time has added an extra



Fowles play: *The French Lieutenant's Woman*

layer of dramatic irony: Jeremy Irons's character Charles is a palaeontologist, and the film is now itself a celluloid fossil, preserving him and Meryl Streep at less than half their present ages (this was Irons's second feature film and first leading role).

But while the modern story proved a tougher nut to crack, the film's Victorian half stands up very well. If its twin themes of romantic obsession and social hypocrisy scarcely make for especially novel observations (although at least the necessarily formal and codified nature of the language is openly contrasted with the more relaxed banter of the modern-day acting couple), they're staged and performed with admirable conviction – indeed, the cutaways to the American actress 'playing' the troubled Sarah Woodruff serve to emphasise the technical achievement of Streep's performance (the first that highlighted her uncanny ear for foreign accents). Indeed, were it not for the fact that it would mean unacceptably ditching the novel's major innovation altogether, this entire half of the film might have worked better dramatically on its own, and it's certainly endowed both with the most striking images (notably Streep's ineffably haunted expression as she turns to the camera while standing on Lyme Regis's famous Cobb) and resonant ideas – whoever would have thought that the theory of evolution would still be up for debate in some quarters in the early 21st century?

**Disc:** A new scan directly from the camera negative brings out the best of Freddie Francis's cinematography, and a pleasing amount of context comes via interviews both new and old (a complete 1981 *South Bank Show* includes the long-deceased Fowles as a contributor), with Ian Christie providing the critical overview.

## FILMS BY WOJCIECH HAS

### THE SARAGOSSA MANUSCRIPT

Poland 1965; Mr Bongo/Region-free Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 183 minutes; 2.39:1

### THE HOURLASS SANATORIUM

Poland 1973; Mr Bongo/Region-free Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 119 minutes; 1.85:1

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

Although it's mildly frustrating that these two films have had their third release in less than a decade while a dozen other Wojciech Has films languish in limbo (compare and contrast with France's Malavida label, which has released all 14 on DVD, albeit only with French subtitles), it's not hard to see why they keep getting singled out. Both adapt notably tricky source material – Jan

Potocki's labyrinthine 1816 novel and Bruno Schulz's 1937 story collection respectively – and imbue it with a quasi-surrealist sensibility that's out of step with most Polish cinema. (Those of Has's compatriots who followed a similarly fabulist bent, such as Walerian Borowczyk, Roman Polanski and Andrzej Zulawski, tended to abandon Poland fairly quickly.)

*The Saragossa Manuscript* was initially released in a two-hour truncation, which now seems to have vanished – a pity, as it would be interesting to see just how much its Calvino-like layering of story upon story suffered from losing a third. But the full version is quite an experience, with Has (and Potocki before him) delighting in whipping out the rug from under audience expectations at every opportunity, gleefully stirring Islamic, Cabbalist and Roma elements into an already bubbling cultural stew in such a way that multiple viewings aren't merely advisable but borderline essential, since the narrative structure supplies a constant stream of new information that's deliberately designed to undermine initial interpretations of events.

*The Hourglass Sanatorium* is even harder to get to grips with, since Has devised a convincing cinematic alternative to Schulz's elliptical style. The Lewis Carrollian conceit – a man (Jan Nowicki) visits his father in a mysterious sanatorium that turns out to be something of a historiographic rabbit hole – is easy enough to read at first, but the subsequent parade of possibly imaginary characters (made of flesh, blood and sometimes clockwork) serves more to lay bare the Nowicki character's troubled psyche than create a coherent narrative. The reconstruction of elements of long-vanished Jewish Poland (Schulz's natural habitat) in the midst of this phantasmagoria reveals the ultimate seriousness of Has's purpose.

**Disc:** The main features are indistinguishable from the Polish Blu-ray editions, which means that *The Hourglass Sanatorium* looks superb (cinematographer Witold Sobocinski was extensively involved in the restoration), while *The Saragossa Manuscript* suffers from overzealous digital 'cleaning', which has given faces an unnaturally waxy look. No extras.

## THE MAN WHO COULD CHEAT DEATH

Terence Fisher; UK 1959; Eureka/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 15; 83 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: interviews, booklet

**Reviewed by Philip Kemp**

A less well-regarded entry in the Hammer Horror canon, *The Man Who Could Cheat Death* might have more of a reputation if the initial choice for the title role, Peter Cushing, hadn't dropped out, pleading illness. The real reason was his increasingly low opinion of Jimmy Sangster's screenwriting skills – not wholly unjustified in this case. German-born Anton Diffring, who took over as would-be immortal Dr Georges Bonnet, gives a stagey, declamatory performance, only outdone by Arnold Marlé as his colleague and co-conspirator Dr Ludwig Weiss. Director Terence Fisher, usually good at toning down actors' excesses, seems to have abdicated control on this occasion.



# New releases

⬅ Tussles with the BBFC didn't help. Nudity was vetoed, of course, but objections were also raised over what the Board felt were overly horrific elements. Sangster's original idea for Bonnet's final transformation sounds promising: "His body seems infused with a strange inner light... It seems to have impregnated his bone structure, allowing the bones to show clearly through the covering of his flesh. His hands are skeletal things, like two great spiders. And his face is a skull, a grinning, greenly glowing skull." The censor found this excessive, and in any case Hammer's pinched budget militated against elaborate special effects. In the event, the stricken Bonnet's face is smothered with what looks like a cheap mudpack. It makes for a distinctly underwhelming climax.

But despite all this – and an overly verbose script derived from a stage play, *The Man in Half Moon Street* by Barré Lyndon (a rip-off of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*) – *The Man Who...* has its moments, thanks mainly to third-billed Christopher Lee (whose innate dignity plays against the prevailing histrionics), Hazel Court at her cool loveliest and an atmospheric score from the young Richard Rodney Bennett.

**Disc:** Eureka's restored 1080p presentation brings out the melodramatic tones of Hammer's palette with vivid clarity. Two substantial interviews fill in the background: one with Kim Newman, outlining the production history with his usual expertise and enthusiasm; and a more ironic exposition from film scholar Jonathan Rigby, exploring the story's stage origins and recounting critical reactions to the film's initial release.

## RASHOMON

Kurosawa Akira; Japan 1950; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD; 88 minutes; Certificate 12; 1.33:1; Features: audio commentary by Stuart Galbraith IV, 'Rashômon' at 65', John Boorman on *Rashômon* featurette

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

Sixty-five years after its release, Kurosawa's modernist masterpiece is still minutely dissected on internet discussion threads, with energetic debates raging over its male gaze, allegorical content and historic status as the gateway drug for the western craving for Japanese cinema.

Watching its lean, astonishingly fleet 88 minutes of looping truth-and-lies again on this choice Blu-ray, however, you revel first in its materiality and its fluidity, each camera movement (like the central characters) telling its own story. Miyagawa Kazuo's camera lopes through swishy, sun-spattered forest thickets that deepen into danger, while Mifune Toshiro's braying bandit darts or tumbles in the duels, heroic or hapless as each unreliable narrator demands. Recalling the immediacy of silent cinema, the big, gestural performances and Hayasaka Fumio's borrowed *Bolero* score amp up the emotion.

The textures in the transfer are delicious, with inky rain pelting on the city gate, breeze-twitched veils and beaded sweat decorating Kyo Machiko ("the Jane Russell of Japan", as the studio dubbed her, rather unfairly) as she segues from prim spouse to taunting hellcat. Stuart Galbraith IV's meticulous commentary is an all-you-can-eat buffet of historical, cultural



Mellow yellow: Shelley Duvall in *3 Women*

and industrial context, yet you could view the film without soundtrack or subtitles and still be gripped. As Robert Altman once observed, it's a story with one fact – the death of a man – around which it creates a cinematic poem. **Disc:** A first-rate transfer, with a gratifyingly clear soundtrack. It's less lavishly extras-draped than the Criterion version, but the standouts are Galbraith's commentary and wide-ranging essay. The John Boorman interview is amiably anecdotal (Kurosawa's answer to his script problems on two-hander *Hell in the Pacific*: "They meet a girl...").

## ROBBERY

Peter Yates; UK 1967; Network/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 114 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: 'making of' documentary, new Michael Deeley interview, 1972 Stanley Baker TV interview, 1966 English-dubbed German feature 'The Great Train Robbery'

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

This gleaming Blu-ray restoration at last does right by the missing celluloid link between Cliff Richard in *Summer Holiday* (1963) and Steve McQueen in *Bullitt* (1968), previously only available on DVD in a horrible 4:3 pan-and-scan.

Directed, like those two films, by Peter Yates, *Robbery* is inspired, of course, by an epochal event in 1960s British history, when 16 men held up the night mail train from London to Glasgow and bagged a then barely conceivable £2.5 million in used banknotes. The news captured the world's imagination and seemed ripe for the cinema screen, but – notwithstanding a 1966 German TV series *Die Gentlemen bitten zur Kasse* (later released theatrically in a cut-down English-language dub, present here as a slightly murky extra) – this was the sole project to come to fruition. Yates's film changes the names but preserves the essential strategy by which the well-organised crew stopped the train and then hid nearby with their swag while police combed the rest of the country. English law being what it was, however, great care still had to be taken so that the by-then convicted perpetrators could find no reason to sue the production. This perhaps explains why, Stanley Baker's authoritative ringleader excepted, the gang come across as a somewhat colourless lot, leaving the fascinating how-they-did-it detail and Yates's crisply assured visualisation of it to command the attention rather than the character-driven internecine tensions of many a heist flick.

For all that, it's the self-contained 15-minute opening sequence, in which a daring jewel stick-up devolves into a hair-raising car chase through suburban west London, for which the film

remains best known (and which subsequently got Yates on McQueen's radar). Perhaps even more impressive, though, is the slow build as Baker and his thoroughly professional comrades wait in the darkness for the train's arrival. Yates adopting the *Rififi* approach of using extended near-silence to intensify the tension. While the script's lack of a distinctive perspective ultimately proves a limiting factor, the intermittently gripping result highlights the undoubted craftsmanship of a no-nonsense British filmmaker who'll continue to be remembered for the versatility exemplified by his two best American projects, the rubber-burning *Bullitt* and the quiet underworld menace of *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* (1973).

**Disc:** The pristine transfer shows up the excellence of Douglas Slocombe's camerawork, particularly the nocturnal heist, where crimson mail sacks contrast with pitch-dark skies – and looks miles better than the scruffy accompanying German feature, whose factual authenticity is rather undercut by the woolly-sounding dubbed dialogue. Offcuts from a 1972 Clive James TV interview with Stanley Baker show the star's brooding charisma just about surviving a distressingly with-it shirt and tie.

## 3 WOMEN

Robert Altman; USA 1977; Arrow Academy/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 124 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: Cannes press Q&A with Shelley Duvall, video interview with critic David Thompson, booklet, trailer

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

Altman famously pitched this intriguing oddity to Fox based on a dream he'd had (those were the days), its off-kilter Palm Springs desert setting prompted by sand in his bed. The film itself has dreamlike elements, but is less subjective than the *Repulsion*-y uncertainties he had introduced in *Images* (1972).

A very American take on the European art film, this is – despite the title – a tale of two permeable female personalities, and is noticeably influenced by *Persona* (one chats, the other doesn't). But its osmotic friendship between lanky logorrhoeic Millie (Shelley Duvall) and the worshipping Pinky (Sissy Spacek) takes a genre-skipping slide from watchful social satire to quasi-horror that's all Altman's own. An unsettling diptych portrait rather than the fresco form that *Nashville* launched, it's often slyly funny – particularly when it's turning its side-eye on 'me generation' vacuity (a dinner party constructed painstakingly from processed snacks, for instance).

Its great treat, though, is Duvall, who wrote Millie's meandering dialogue herself, moving her character seamlessly from deluded husband-hunter to sideswiped best friend. This carefully calibrated Blu-ray transfer lets you soak up the loving detail in her sunshine-yellow world.

Surely a film that's crying out for a recherché Secret Cinema event: Dodge City dirt bikes and tuna melts all round.

**Disc:** The transfer restores much of the detail lost in earlier versions; the soundtrack makes a good fist of Gerald Busby's uneasy, atonal score; and you can marvel at Duvall's 1977 Cannes Q&A, an impromptu hotel-room seminar on working with Altman that's a world away from today's pre-digested press jaunts. Ⓢ

## ENAMORADA

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

A uniquely Mexican take on *The Taming of the Shrew* mixes macho action, screwball comedy and rapturous romance

**Reviewed by Philip Concannon**

"I am Mexican cinema!" Emilio Fernández liked to tell people when they asked him about the state of filmmaking in his country. When one critic dared to dispute this grandiose claim, the director reputedly pulled a gun on him.

That story may be apocryphal but then Fernández tended to take a 'print the legend' approach to his own life, even if his life was already interesting enough to need no further embellishment. Having killed a man as a youth and fought in the quashed rebellion against President Obregón, Fernández ended up in jail in 1924, facing a 20-year prison sentence. He quickly escaped and fled to America, where he landed in Los Angeles and discovered the movies.

*Enamorada* (1946) opens in a manner befitting Fernández's image as a rebellious figure of macho virility (he would later play the vengeance-seeking patriarch in *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*): the credits are preceded by the firing of a cannon, which is immediately followed by the thunder of hooves as a revolutionary army takes control of the town of Cholula. What unfolds after the credits, however, is in fact a spry romantic comedy that displays the director's lighter touch. The meet-cute between its two leads, half an hour into the film, could have come from any Hollywood comedy of the era, as the revolutionary General Reyes (Pedro Armendáriz) gets slapped by Beatriz (María Félix) for commenting on her legs as she passes in the street. He tells her that he'd risk another slap for another glimpse of her legs, and she gives him exactly what he's asked for, lifting her skirt and then knocking him to the floor in front of his men.

The template for *Enamorada* is Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, with the wealthy and anti-revolutionary Beatriz being particularly resistant to any taming. She is introduced wielding a gun and ready to defend herself against any man who dares to approach her, and throughout the film Félix brings a riveting emotional intensity to her performance; but ultimately both characters need to be tamed here, or at least find a common ground, and it is the Church that brings them together.

The third key character is Padre Sierra (Fernando Fernández – Emilio's brother), a priest who is both Reyes's childhood friend and Beatriz's most trusted confidant, and he encourages these two headstrong individuals to be more humble and spiritual in their outlook. The scenes shot inside his church have a transcendent quality, with the great cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa – who studied his craft under Gregg Toland – beautifully exploiting the architecture



Mexican meet-cute: María Félix and Pedro Armendáriz face off in *Enamorada*

*Fernández took a 'print the legend' approach to his life, even if his life was interesting enough to need no further embellishment*

and light to emphasise the epiphanies the characters experience within its walls.

Figueroa's mentoring by Toland and Fernández's immersion in the home of American filmmaking during his formative years both seem to contribute to the aesthetic sheen of classical Hollywood cinema that is evident throughout *Enamorada*. The bickering relationship between the two leads has the ebb and flow of a screwball comedy (although Rosalind Russell never actually tried to blow up Cary Grant...), while the more tender scenes are filmed with the intimacy and rapturous beauty of a Frank Borzage romance. The emotional high point of the film involves Reyes serenading Beatriz beneath her bedroom window,

an act that – finally – starts to break down her defences. The camera largely focuses on Félix's expressive face throughout this sequence, and one close-up on her eyes in particular is breathtaking.

Through their very successful series of collaborations in the 1940s, Fernández and Figueroa are credited with playing a key role in putting Mexican cinema on the map, and *Enamorada* was seen as an important film by the authorities in helping to establish the country's post-revolution identity. The narrative works to gradually bring together two fiercely independent and politically opposed people through the mediation of the Church, and the film's climax proves to be genuinely stirring. Just as Beatriz is about to marry her wealthy American fiancé, she is distracted by the sound of Reyes's army leaving Cholula to take the revolution to another town. Inadvertently but symbolically ripping off the pearl necklace the American has given her, Beatriz follows both her heart and her sense of national pride to join Reyes, and the pair then march side by side into a changing Mexico.

There is a curious footnote to this picture. Shortly after *Enamorada*'s release, Paulette Goddard optioned the remake rights, believing that the film could emulate its Mexican success in the US and reinvigorate her career. She ended up enlisting most of the same production team to make *The Torch* (1950), with Fernández again in the director's chair, Figueroa once more behind the camera and Pedro Armendáriz reprising his role as General Reyes. The result is a bizarrely sluggish and tone-deaf film that follows the original almost shot for shot but fails to match it in every conceivable way. Of course, the project was doomed to failure the moment Goddard decided to take the lead role for herself; there was no way that she was ever going to emulate the passionate defiance in María Félix's eyes. Who could? 🍷

### WHAT THE PAPERS SAID



**'A deliriously romantic reworking of *The Taming of the Shrew*... Acted and directed with wit, verve and passion, the film also benefits from Gabriel Figueroa's stunning black & white photography; see it, too, for the overwhelmingly**

**lovely scene when Armendáriz finally begins to win over the stubborn Félix with a heart-rending serenade.'**

**Geoff Andrew** 'Time Out'





Smoke and mirrors: David Lynch must rank as the most interpretation-averse American artist this side of William Eggleston

## IN DREAMS

### DAVID LYNCH

#### The Man from Another Place

By Dennis Lim, Amazon/New Harvest, 192pp, £8.99, ISBN 9781477830536

#### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

David Lynch's seductive filmography invites regular revisiting, but the body of critical exegesis devoted to him is another affair entirely. It is glad tidings then to be able to report that Dennis Lim's *David Lynch: The Man from Another Place* joins Chris Rodley's interview collection *Lynch on Lynch* and Michael Atkinson's BFI Modern Classics entry on *Blue Velvet* in the pantheon of essential – and essentially readable – writing on the auteur, arriving before he is set to return from a decade-long hiatus from longform moving image work with new episodes of *Twin Peaks*.

Lim's critical biography covers Lynch's peripatetic boyhood as the son of a researcher for the US Forest Service, his emergence as the public face of Transcendental Meditation in

the 21st century, and everything that came in between. In addition to examining the work of Lynch the artist, Lim looks at Lynch the phenomenon, analysing his enduring popularity as both an object for study and a cult figure. (He also recalls the backlash which hit Lynch in the early-to-mid 1990s after a period of media oversaturation, something which has been largely forgotten in his subsequent name-brand pre-eminence.) Lim notes, for instance, that *Blue Velvet*, released in 1986, came along just as "postmodernism was a thriving field of study and a dominant mode of academic discourse" – and it is from the halls of academia that some of the most impenetrable writing on Lynch has originated. Defining the appeal that Lynch's work holds for the lay viewer, Lim dwells on its

*Lim characterises Lynch as a transitional artist, positioned somewhere between painting and cinema, and film and digital*

immersive quality, like luxurious upholstery. "It is not insignificant," he writes, "that many who came of age in the 1980s and 1990s – a sizable swath of Generation X – discovered Lynch in the intimate sanctums of their own living rooms or bedrooms." (This swath includes the author of the book, and the author of this book review.)

The combined sense of sanctuary and threat of its violation is essential to the work that made 'David Lynch', at least briefly, a household name. "From the title's jokey insinuation of a nurturing bosom," Lim writes, "*Twin Peaks* privileges comfort." Lynch's experience of making the programme was, however, not always so comfortable. Where he was drawn to the episodic format by the opportunity that it provided to take up residence and linger in an environment, others in positions of power demanded narrative resolution. Explaining away mystery has always been anathema to Lynch, the most interpretation-averse American artist this side of William Eggleston, though despite previous frustrations with network brass he would nevertheless attempt to return

to television with the ill-starred *Mulholland Dr.*, a decision he justified by saying, “I just wanted to enter into a world longer.” Lim identifies the standalone film of *Mulholland Dr.* (2001) as vanguard to a moment in the early 00s when “a participatory engagement with fiction, a collective hunger... [an] appetite for narrative complexity” was mounting, as he earlier writes of Lynch’s last epochal film, *Blue Velvet*, as condensing something in the atmosphere of the Reagan 80s. If Lynch is loath to offer up interpretations of his work, plenty of others have been happy to take up the task of code-breaking, and perhaps it’s the suggestion of an interpretive game in his work which has made him an auteur of choice for the same demographic that floods the internet with fan theories. The charm of Lim’s book, however, lies in the fact that it is less interested in decrypting the films than it is in closely describing and contextualising them.

Discussing Lynch’s attraction to world-building, Lim quotes Umberto Eco on the prerequisites of cult filmmaking, its need to offer up “a completely furnished world”. (How many other directorial careers are so inextricable from images of rooms and their decor?) In consistently delivering on this, if in nothing else, Lynch may be said to resemble such disparate cult figures as Michael Mann, Wes Anderson and George Lucas, whose *Return of the Jedi* (1983) Lynch was once offered the opportunity to direct. Lynch’s early desire to expand beyond the narrative confines of the feature film recalls a much-repeated story which Lim identifies, in the opening of his book, as one of the turning points of Lynch’s creative life: in 1967, while Lynch is a painting student at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, a wind through the trees seems to stir to life a canvas that he’s working on, and he begins to dream of making paintings that move.

Cross-referencing to Lynch’s works in a number of different media, as well as bringing in outside comparisons – *Mulholland Dr.* is likened to Roberto Bolaño’s posthumous 2004 novel *2666* – Lim characterises Lynch as a transitional artist, positioned somewhere between painting and cinema, between film and digital, between old cinephile culture and the so-called Golden Age of Television. Lim is the current director of programming at the Film Society of Lincoln Center and, back when the title mattered, a former film editor of the *Village Voice*, in which capacity he conducted his first of several interviews with Lynch in 2001. It is safe to say, then, that Lim is about as well-versed in cinematic esoterica as any man living, but though he does manage to bring avant-garde specialists like Parker Tyler and P. Adams Sitney, among other eclectic sources, into the conversation, he always keeps a general audience in mind, quick to courteously offer a definition of *politique des auteurs* for any reader who might not be up to speed. As Lim notes early on, Lynch is a seeming contradiction in terms, “a populist experimental filmmaker”, and the book is an appropriate companion to his work: a clear, concise, accessible discussion of an artist who traffics in the inchoate and unnamable. ☺

## AMERICAN NEO-NOIR

### The Movie Never Ends

By Alain Silver and James Ursini, Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, £22.50, 336pp, ISBN 9781480386266

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

The ‘classic’ period of American *film noir*, as defined by authors Alain Silver and James Ursini in various editions of their *Film Noir: The Encyclopedia*, ran from *The Maltese Falcon* in 1941 (or *Stranger on the Third Floor* in 1940) to *Touch of Evil* (1958) and *Underworld U.S.A.* (1961). They cite John Boorman’s *Point Blank* (1967) as the birth of neo-*noir*, though a case could be made for Jack Smight’s *Harper* (1966). These films draw on American crime writers (Richard Stark and Ross MacDonal) a generation or so on from Chandler and Hammett, and set loose archetypal *noir* figures – the vengeance-seeking betrayed crook, the lone-wolf private eye – in a daylit steel-and-pastel California which is no longer in black and white, where they are underestimated and ridiculed as obsolete, though corruption has changed rather than gone away.

As the exhaustive filmography (500-plus titles) demonstrates, neo-*noir* is still with us nearly 50 years on, and has therefore lasted well over twice as long as the original cycle. The book went to press before Paul Thomas Anderson’s *Inherent Vice* (2014) appeared, so misses out on the fact that today’s filmmakers are as likely to want to pay homage to Robert Altman’s *The Long Goodbye* (1973) or Roman Polanski’s *Chinatown* (1974) as to Howard Hawks’s *The Big Sleep* (1946) or Billy Wilder’s *Double Indemnity* (1944). Indeed, the location smog of the 1970s is as remote and evocative now as the

*Today’s filmmakers are as likely to pay homage to Robert Altman’s ‘The Long Goodbye’ as to Howard Hawks’s ‘The Big Sleep’*

studio-shot chiaroscuro of the 1940s, suggesting we will soon need to redefine the periods we think of as ‘classic’ and ‘neo’ in the *noir* game.

The title *American Neo-Noir* excludes variants from Godard, Truffaut or Melville, not to mention Italian *gialli* or Japanese yakuza movies, though many of the American films under discussion draw on these models just as the classic *noirs* were shaped by German expressionism as well as American hardboiled writing. Expanded from an essay in *Film Noir: The Encyclopedia*, the book looks at subgenres but has a firmer grip on classic figures like femmes fatales and crooked cops than contemporary appropriative modes like the pack-rat borrowings of the Quentin Tarantino school, the comic-book stylisation of *Sin City* (2005) or the urban superhero movie. Welcome attention is paid to marginal direct-to-video in the 90s and microbudget download-in-the-new-millennium efforts, highlighting interesting work like *Poison Ivy* (1992) and *Wild Things* (1998) and their non-theatrical sequels.

A survey rather than a history, the book marks out territory for further assessment – and makes points with well-chosen images, including a selection of posters which show how the packaging of these films has evolved. It seems to have slipped out without a proper proofread, leading to a scattering of inconsistencies (mixing up the names of actors and characters) and errors (confusing the *Harper* sequel *The Drowning Pool* with the *Dirty Harry* sequel *The Dead Pool*). It’s also oddly scattershot – by the authors’ lights, almost anything could be *noir* – and sometimes lazy: in discussing Dennis Hopper’s *The Hot Spot* (1990), the text mentions novelists David Goodis and Jim Thompson, but not Charles Williams, who actually wrote the novel the film is based on (and the script).

Nevertheless, this is a useful book on a big unexplored subject. “If film noir is no longer the American style, certainly no other movement has emerged to replace it,” write Silver and Ursini. “Unless and until filmmakers discover another mirror to hold up to American society, none ever will.” ☺



Last tango in Texas: Dennis Hopper’s *The Hot Spot* (1990), starring Don Johnson and Jennifer Connolly





Building the future: the vaudeville performances that effectively launched the global moving-picture boom were shot in W.K.L. Dickson's 'Black Maria' studio

## STUDIOS BEFORE THE SYSTEM

### Architecture, Technology, and the Emergence of Cinematic Space

By Brian R. Jacobson, Columbia University Press, 296pp, £20.50, ISBN 9780231172813

By Ian Christie

Cathedrals or factories? Two figurative ways of categorising the film studio as a major site of fascination had emerged by the 1920s. For some, they were places of mystery, temples to the new cult of cinema, as in Blaise Cendrars's 1936 book, *Hollywood: Mecca of the Movies*. But for many more they represented a new kind of factory, manufacturing dreams. From the 1940s, studios would even start to appear on screen, as filmmakers recognised their tantalising appeal to audiences. But the originality of Brian Jacobson's book lies in revealing a prehistory of the modern studio, reaching back to the mid-1890s and finishing with the launch of Universal City's lavish behind-the-scenes tour, which opened as early as 1915 after the East Coast industry had begun to move west to Los Angeles, soon to become the epicentre of Hollywood's 'studio system'.

Jacobson confines his study to just six key organisations in the United States and France, examining these in detail while noting that significant early developments also took place in Britain and Germany. Two contrasting foundational structures rightly receive close attention: the 'Black Maria' studio created by W.K.L. Dickson for Edison in New Jersey in 1893, and Georges Méliès's glasshouse structure, built on the outskirts of Paris in 1897. Out of Dickson's black box would come the vaudeville performances that excited viewers of the Kinetoscope in 1894-95 and effectively launched the worldwide moving-picture boom. Jacobson argues that this strangely angular structure of wood and tar paper was anything but 'primitive', being designed by Dickson to combine efficiently all the requirements of early motion photography,

including what would soon be called a laboratory, while rotating to follow the necessary sunlight.


Maximising available sunlight, as well as DIY economy, were also priorities for Méliès when he devised a structure for making trick-based films that would extend the repertoire of his Parisian magic theatre. In both cases, Jacobson shows that these novel structures drew upon existing traditions: the photographic studio for Dickson and the iron and glass architecture of Paxton's revolutionary Crystal Palace and the many Parisian exhibition halls and arcades which would influence all 'daylight' film studios for two decades. Film historians, he maintains, have underestimated the sophistication of the 19th-century photographic studio, devoted as much to creating pictorial illusion as realistic portraiture. Equally, they have failed to grasp how the early studios were more than merely functional, but made filmmakers key figures in creating the period's "new conceptions and uses of space".

Jacobson's readings of key Méliès films as virtuoso displays of 'cineplasticity' – a term coined by the French theorist Elie Faure in 1922 – encourage looking at these afresh, in terms of the actual spaces that they exploit and the fluid illusory ones they create on screen. He also reveals Méliès as shrewdly aware of how the industry was developing, so that the second studio he built in 1907 was equipped with the latest Cooper Hewitt mercury-vapour lights. When the Biograph Company had installed these three years earlier, its output had risen dramatically, putting it ahead of Edison, and making clear that both the economic and artistic future of production lay in the 'dark studio'. Méliès's electrically lit Studio B allowed him to develop one of his most successful genres: burlesquing the fantastic worlds of Jules Verne's novels. His longest film,

*Black Maria's strangely angular structure was far from 'primitive', combining all the requirements of early motion photography*

*The Conquest of the Pole* (1912), would exploit the new space as a factory set in its own right, as well as for staging elaborate scenic illusions – and Jacobson sees this as a forerunner of later films that combine "two kinds of world-building". Film studios belonged to the new architecture of urban industry, but their 'product' was the artificial environments of film entertainment.

Despite the advantages of enclosed dark studios, another model emerged around 1907 which was influenced by trends in factory design. Edison's Bronx studio at Bedford Park was a prototype for the 'daylight factory', making good use of the inventor's own Portland cement among its materials. Here modern factory design helped to create large uninterrupted spaces that could accommodate the side-by-side shooting of many films simultaneously. And, as Jacobson shows, trade journals were now alert to the visible results of improved studio structures. Meanwhile, France's two major companies fought back against the threat of American domination by stressing the scale of their own physical plant: Gaumont's Cité Elgé in north-east Paris and Pathé's factory complex at Joinville were both advertised and proudly celebrated as veritable 'cities', housing every aspect of the business on vast sites. But before long a combination of World War I, weather and differing industrial policies would put southern California far ahead of any studio complex that Europe could devise.

I have emphasised the architectural dimension of Jacobson's study, but this ambitious book wants to reconnect cinema history with histories of technology and visibility, and with aesthetics, drawing on a wide range of theoretical perspectives. The philosopher Martin Heidegger's concept of 'enframing' is invoked to consider how cinema's technology manipulates the natural environment. Walter Benjamin's unfinished work on Paris arcades underpins the discussion of how glass architecture enabled film studios to reproduce industrially the world around them. Above all, it contributes suggestively to the still-neglected theme of cinematic space: pinpointing how and where this was first created. 

# Read

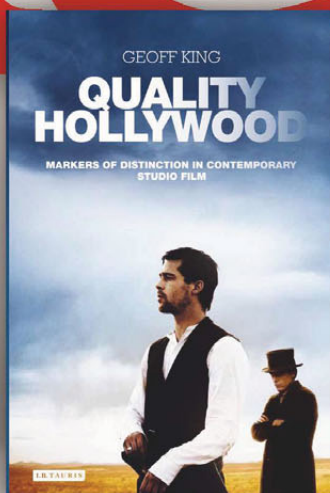


## GONE WITH THE WIND

By Helen Taylor, BFI Film Classics, BFI/Palgrave, 120pp, paperback, £12.99, ISBN 9781844578719

*Gone with the Wind* (1939) – adjusted for inflation, the highest-grossing film of all time – is sometimes dismissed as a reactionary popular romance. Interrogating such dismissals and hailing the film's vast ambition and astonishing production values, Helen Taylor explores its influence on filmmakers, popularity with generations of audiences and impact on everyday language. She argues that the film, with its disturbing racial politics, set the agenda for more than half a century's film representations of slavery and the Civil War.

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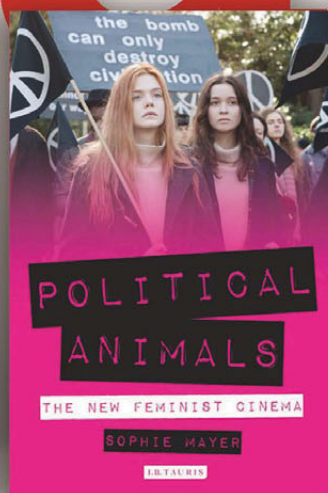
## QUALITY HOLLYWOOD

Markers of Distinction in Contemporary Studio Film

By Geoff King; I.B. Tauris; 336pp; paperback, £17.99, ISBN 9781784530457; hardback, £62, ISBN 9781784530440

What defines 'quality' in Hollywood film? Nuanced plots and artful cinematography have typically been associated with arthouse and independent film. But the 21st century has seen a new era of mainstream 'quality cinema', with films such as *Inception*, *The Social Network*, and *Mystic River*. King unpacks this phenomenon, examining contemporary uses of critical terms, connecting them to cultural taste patterns and industry developments. Spanning star power, 'high' and 'low' culture, the impact of social media on marketing Hollywood films and the changing role of speciality divisions, this book illuminates a major recent shift in Hollywood cinema.

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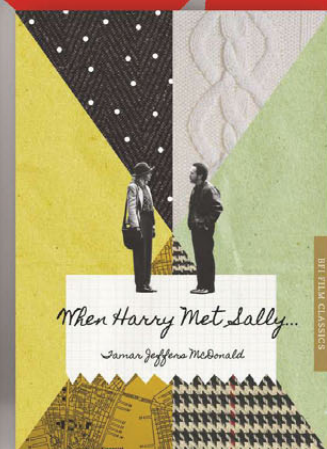
## POLITICAL ANIMALS

The New Feminist Cinema

By Sophie Mayer, I.B. Tauris, 272pp, paperback, £16.99, ISBN 9781784533724

Female filmmakers are hitting the headlines. The last five years have witnessed: the first Best Director Academy Award won by a woman; female filmmakers emerging from places such as Iran, South Korea and Kenya; the first stirrings of a 'trans cinema'; and Pussy Riot's documentation of offline activism. *Political Animals* argues that a new wave of courageous and complex feminist cinema is speaking to a new audience hungry for intersectional accounts of women that are missing in the mainstream. It reveals how innovative production and distribution strategies are responding to urgent political situations and tunes in to the transnational, transgenerational conversations that are taking place between filmmakers such as Claire Denis, Barbara Hammer, Haifaa al-Mansour and Clio Barnard.

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## WHEN HARRY MET SALLY...

By Tamar Jeffers McDonald, BFI Film Classics, BFI/Palgrave, 104pp, paperback, £12.99, ISBN 9781844579075

*When Harry Met Sally* (1989) is one of the definitive romantic comedies and has had an enormous impact on the development of the genre since its release. With an illuminating scene-by-scene analysis, Tamar Jeffers McDonald explores the film's substance and cultural value, and reappraises the importance of the romcom genre more broadly.

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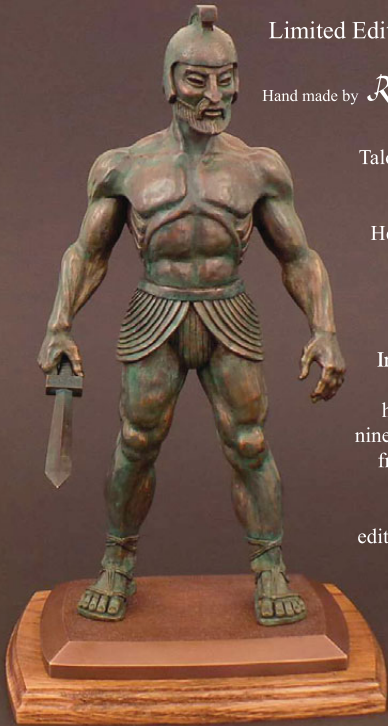
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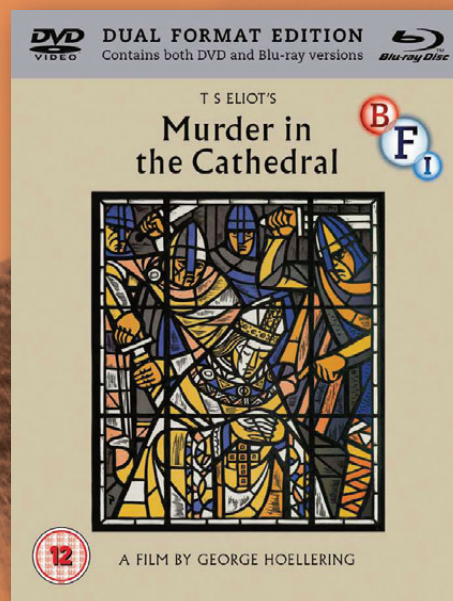


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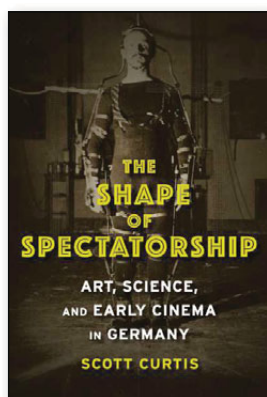
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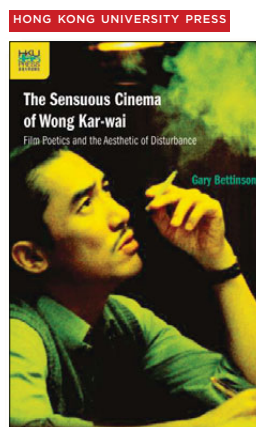
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# READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN Fax: 020 7436 2327 Email: S&S@bfi.org.uk

## CUT TO THE CHASE

I was fascinated by Mark Cousins's startling observation of quite how far women have dominated editing (S&S, 'Scissor sisters', August and September), particularly for such historically high-profile films. While I accept that gender culture factors could be contributing to this, I was surprised Cousins made no mention of the role of history.

Women started to come into the non-agrarian workforce in greater numbers around World War I, at the same time that cinema as a meaningful source of employment emerged, and they filled jobs that had no gendered precedent. Furthermore, the film industry's lack of respectability (because of its lower-class origins in, primarily, music hall) created job opportunities that did not exist elsewhere for women – for instance, marriage bars were not systematically applied as they were in the civil service.

In addition, apprenticeship was the primary means of teaching the craft. I suspect that some men would have found reporting to a woman a challenge at that period of our social history.

**Stephane Duckett** London

## A LADY VANISHES

For the record, a notable omission from the French segment of Mark Cousins's very welcome, revelatory round-up of female film editors was Hong Kong-born, Paris-based Mary Stephen, a regular cutter for the late Eric Rohmer (*A Winter's Tale*, *Rendezvous in Paris*, *A Summer's Tale*, *Autumn Tale*, *The Lady and the Duke*, *Triple Agent*, etc.). She has also directed and edited her own movies, such as *Ombres de soie* (1978) and *Justocoeur* (1980).

**Clyde Jeavons** London

## SCALA FEVER

Danny Leigh's elegy for the old Scala cinema at King's Cross ('Variety parade', S&S, October) brought back memories of when I used to dash off after work to see, for the first time, such classics as *Tokyo Story*, *Celine and Julie Go Boating*, *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* and *Providence*. It seemed a particularly appropriate setting for *Stalker*, with the Northern Line trains mingling with the clanking of the railway work car.

**Alan Pavelin** Kent

## ACID RAYNS

I am frankly startled that Tony Rayns found so much fault with my "asinine" audio commentary for the BFI's *Eyes Without a Face* (Home Cinema, S&S, October). I am a Midwestern American, an autodidact rather than an academic, and how I pronounce words and proper names is part of who I am. I aspire to accuracy, sometimes hitting the mark and once in a great while falling victim to my accent – or a verbal slip during a sustained 90-minute recording. But I assure your readership that everyone in America pronounces Elke Sommer's name rather like that, and for me to have done otherwise would have sounded affected to my ears.

## LETTER OF THE MONTH TOP GIRLS



Congratulations on the 'Female Gaze' section in your October issue and the fascinating selection of films, which included several items unknown to me as well as reminders of directors and films I cherish (Marleen Gorris, Margarethe von Trotta, Allison Anders's *Gas Food Lodging*, etc.). Might I add another couple to your list which have moved me profoundly: Amy Holden Jones's *Love Letters* (1983) has a similar premise to *The Bridges of Madison County* (1995) but far surpasses it in terms of

emotional depth and complexity, and Jamie Lee Curtis gives the performance of her career; and Iciar Bollain's *Even the Rain* (2010, above) again has points of comparison with a mainstream success – Ben Affleck's *Argo* – but also far surpasses it, in terms of political complexity, psychological nuance and narrative tension. Oh yes, and there are the films of Christine Pascal... and Sarah Polley... and...

This could run and run.

**Neil Sinyard** University of Hull

Mr Rayns also charges me with wasting time by simply describing scenes: I am actually reading the scenes to explain how and why they work, how individual movements and flourishes say something about the characters. He goes on to charge me with looting career details from the IMDb. I do use it as a reference, but this film has been a near-lifelong obsession and I am not unschooled in the careers of these people. Some of the information I share, and which may now help to inform the internet, was taken from my own primary research. For example, my biographic information about Edith Scob comes from a lengthy interview that Frédéric-Albert Levy conducted on my behalf, working from my questions, in Paris in 2004.

On the other hand, I do accept blame for mistakenly identifying Raymond Durnat as an Irish critic. To explain: I once received a kindly note from Mr Durnat about my work, sent from an address in Ireland, and that detail evidently rose to the top as I was scripting my talk. But was it necessary (or even professional) to stress such an error?

I love this film and was honoured to represent it as its commentator. I hope your readers won't be discouraged from acquiring the BFI's beautiful disc by Mr Rayns's blunt and dismissive assessment of me personally, and I invite them to listen to my work and ponder the question, as I do, of where the hell this came from.

**Tim Lucas** By email

## IT NEVER RAYNS BUT IT POURS

I must challenge the condescension of Tony Rayns's review of the BFI release of Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* (*Les Yeux sans visage*). Tim Lucas's focus on personal reminiscence, factual data and close observation of image, sound, music and so on is more to my liking than commentaries which comprise endless dry and subjective interpretation – for example, as heard on the Masters of Cinema release of *Vampyr* (by someone whose name escapes me).

The grating sneer at Lucas's pronunciation brings back my own encounters with ticket-office snobs during early forays to the NFT to discover non-English-speaking cinema, as in trepidation I asked for tickets for *L'Atalante* and *A bout de souffle*, and indeed *Les Yeux sans visage*, only to be made to repeat the name for their amusement. Nice to see the tradition being maintained – a tradition on which Raymond Durnat would have heaped deserved scorn.

**Tony Floyd** By email

## Additions and corrections

**October** p.48 Apologies to Catherine Wheatley, who translated Jacques Rancière's feature but wasn't credited; p.68 *Macbeth*, Certificate 15, 112m 50s; p.75 *American Ultra*, Certificate 15, 95m 33s; p.83 *Horse Money*, Certificate 12A, 104m 45s; p.86 *Legend*, Certificate 18, 131m 15s; p.91 *99 Homes*, Certificate 15, 112m 21s; p.92 *Orion: The Man Who Would Be King*, Certificate 12A, 86m 16s; p.93 *Pixels*, aspect ratio is 2.35:1 (not, as we said, 1.85:1); p.97 *Tangerines*, Certificate 15, 86m 30s; p.98 *3 1/2 Minutes*, Certificate 15, 98m 32s, UK publicity title: *3 1/2 Minutes, Ten Bullets*; p.100 *Zombie Fight Club*, Not submitted for theatrical classification, Video certificate: 18, Running time: 91m 75s  
**September** p.70 *Closed Curtain*, Certificate 12A, 105m 49s



# THE THIN RED LINE



The wake left by the troop ships at the close of Terrence Malick's film shows human catastrophes are little more than ripples in nature

## By David Thomson

The war in the Pacific did not end at Guadalcanal. That was over by February 1943, which was early. But at the close of Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line* (1998), American soldiers board a troop-carrier to be taken home, or 'home', with the air and fatigue of a decisive and significant victory – the kind movies cling to. The new commander turns out to be George Clooney (with nothing to do except be George). That feels odder now than it did in 1998. A star in a film so unimpressed by acted stories is as disorienting as the chic Amal Clooney working as a lawyer in the Maldivian islands.

Malick ends the film with the sea and the surface agitation left by troop carriers. As if the ocean did not have motion of its own, and had always had it – it is the Pacific Ocean, which begins to question the importance of this war. Beyond that, Malick sees birds flying – so short-lived, yet so eternal – and even an odd formation of grass or weed rising out of the water. The lives of the men, and their deaths, have been observed. They become desultory, numbered yet insignificant. So this was a strange project to have so many Hollywood actors anxious to get on board, until some of them saw the picture and realised they had been reduced or omitted. But the identities of the personnel in war are immaterial.

James Jones had been at Guadalcanal and he was determined to make his 1962 novel a true portrait of combat. In *From Here to Eternity* there had been only that vivid air-raid on Schofield Barracks and Pearl itself. But in Jones's mind the Prewitt from 1953 (Montgomery Clift) lived again in the grave face of Witt (Jim Caviezel, who is beautiful like Clift – but calmer). The most ravishing moment in *The Thin Red Line's* gradual conclusion is when Witt finds himself surrounded by Japanese infantry (so camouflaged they are like bushes). He is going to die, but he waits for that in a kind of reverie formed by the film's sense of Guadalcanal as less a particular military action than spasms passing through the flora and fauna. So Witt is a tree waiting to be struck down and the look on his face may be the moment when Malick the modern storyteller became a philosopher who knows all stories are alike and thus unimportant. Their sameness is the proper match for nature, where iguanas and parrots observe skirmishing humans with no more passion than the grass can muster when the wind blows on it.

At 170 minutes, the skirmishing to take those hills, and the dispute between the ranting Tall (Nick Nolte) and the anguished Staros (Elias Koteas), are offset by the gentle creep of time in the view of an ornithologist or a botanist

*The lives of the men, and their deaths, have been observed. They become desultory, numbered yet insignificant*

more than a dramatist. We are not riding with an Audie Murphy "to hell and back", but on a Steadicam voyage through the lush grassland of the islands (there was a touch of this in Anthony Mann's 1957 *Men in War*). Tall insists the hill is vital. Staros says it is not worth the slaughter of men. But the mode of the film reckons those points of view are sentimental or 'Hollywood'. The island is unaware it is being fought over.

This attempt is not just beautiful and novel; it signals a cinema more attuned to duration than narrative, faithful to lasting transience instead of tidy endings. *The Thin Red Line* could close on a deserted shore, where the war has passed on. But there's a problem here, and it has been like quicksand to Malick as less happens in his films while the philosophical reach becomes more far-reaching. It's a strange discord of ambition and quietism.

*The Thin Red Line* is a sensuous experience: it deserves 35mm Panavision on a huge screen. (Does that mean it can hardly be known again?) But there's something else contradictory in the ending. Malick exults in the island being above the conflict in a natural world that will persist after our fuss ends. That closeness to insignificance is touching. But then one has to realise that John Toll's cinematography is 'magnificent', that these men are star faces, that Malick's very reticence is 'artistic'. As if art really matters amid insignificance. So much of movie-making – not least its portentous way of ending – is emphatic and grand (think of the moralising over "earning things" in *Saving Private Ryan*). The medium is so lost when it tries to be casual and resigned. **S**



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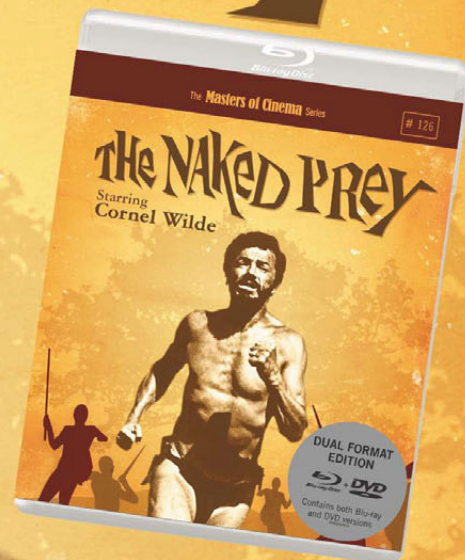
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